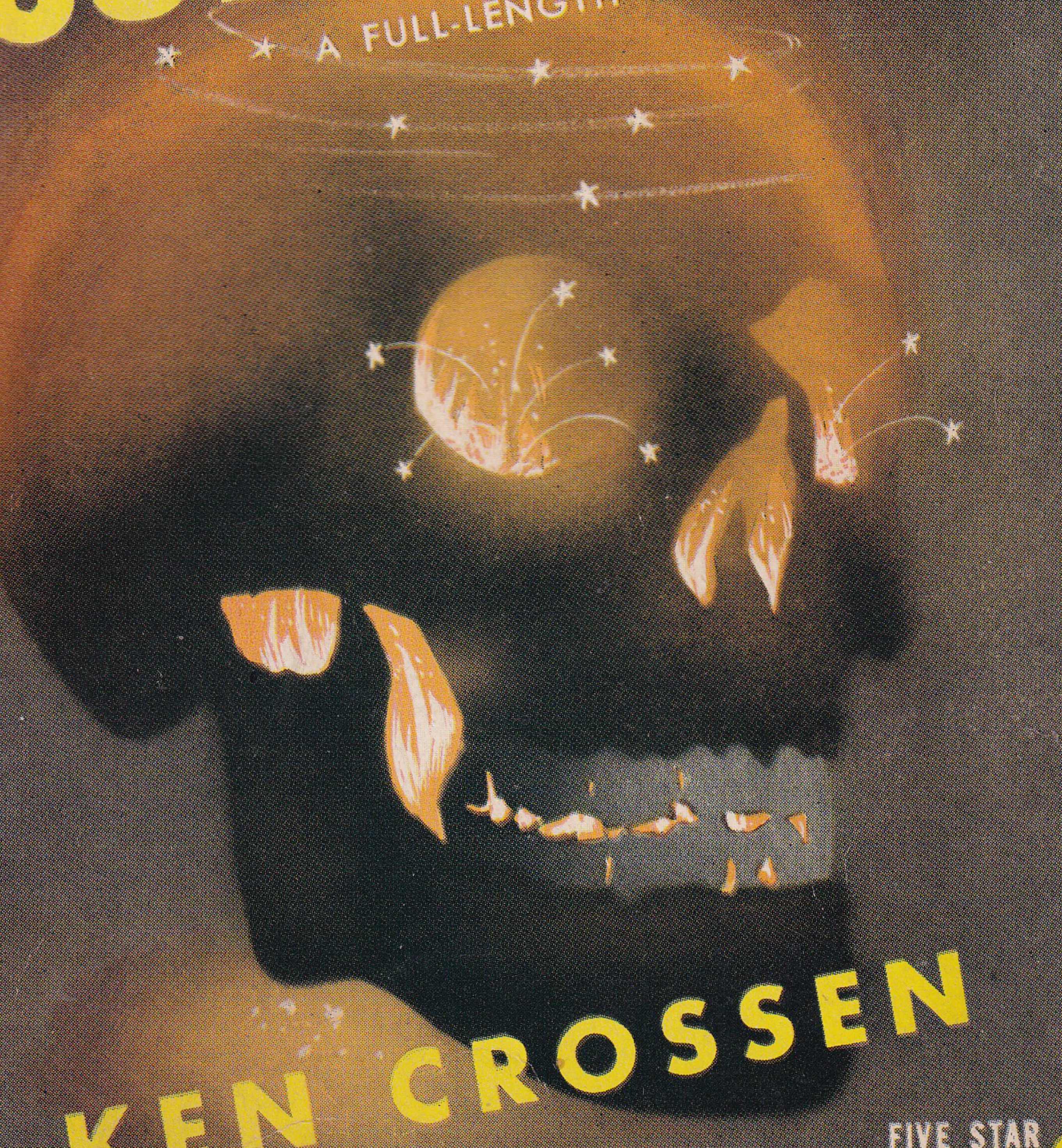
FDC

930

murder out of mind

A FULL-LENGTH ORIGINAL NOVEL



KEN CROSSEN

FIVE STAR MYSTERY ②

MURDER OUT OF MIND

by

Ken Crossen

(Author of "The Case of the Phantom Fingerprints")

A FIVE STAR MYSTERY

Complete
Never Before Published

GREEN PUBLISHING CO.
NEW YORK, N. Y.

All characters and situations in this book are fictitious; any resemblance to actual persons or occurrences is a coincidence. . . . .

This book is produced in full compliance with
government wartime regulations regarding
the conservation of paper and
other materials.

Copyright, 1945, by the author

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

MURDER OUT OF MIND

CHAPTER ONE

There was a note of finality in the clicking of the latch as the door shut. It said more plainly than anything else that he was shut off from the rest of the house. Locked in, although no lock had been turned. Alone, although there was someone in every room. Animated protoplasm, known to a small world as Frank Bruce, turned into a mechanical receiving set for thoughts.

The house reeked of thoughts. Frank Bruce was unimpressed. He *was* impressed by the fact that the house was the property of Martin Joyce—the Number One Wolf of Broadway—a man who had money and was careless enough to back shows with it, and foolish enough to want no publicity to arise from the fact.

Frank Bruce was a writer of plays.

No one had ever compared him to Sherwood, O'Neill, or Coward, but he was on his way. His first play, produced the year before, had been an artistic if not a financial success. It had been good enough to cause an aging ingenue to make passes at him in the hope that he would write a play for her in return for her few remaining favors.

His newest play promised, if he could depend on the producer's reactions, to be the hit the other one had not been. That would probably mean Hollywood, but Frank had no objections to tainting himself with a little money. He was practical. He was looking ahead.

He was in love.

He walked across the room and gazed out on the endless expanse of lawn, now artificially lighted. The Joyce estate in White Plains was a further argument for a commercial approach. The gods of finance might be tainted but they also had a hell of a lot of fun.

Frank Bruce sat down at the desk and picked up the pencil that lay beside a neat stack of paper. He scrawled his name at the top of the first sheet. Davall had said he was to write down every thought, either picture or words. He wrote the name *Kalli Walker.*

She was red-headed. She was beautiful. She had promised to marry him. She was also Davall's secretary.

ROBERT DAVALL, MASTER OF MAGICAL MYSTERIES OFFERS $10,000 TO ANYONE PRODUCING PSYCHIC PHENOMENA WHICH HE CANNOT DUPLICATE!

That was the way he had met her. He had dropped in one night at the hotel where regularly Robert Davall tested those who wanted a crack at the ten thousand. He remained to fall in love.

He wanted her to quit her job and marry him, but she was making him wait until they had more security. A successful play would furnish it, whereas his job of adapting old mystery novels for radio wouldn't. She had a good job with Davall.

Davall had continued his exposure of mediums until he had enough for a book, *Unmasking the Ghosts;* then he turned his attention to the field of extra-sensory perception. Martin Joyce was also interested in the subject, perhaps because he saw some way of making money from it, and had agreed to finance a series of tests. For the past week, Davall and his subjects had been staying at the Joyce estate. That morning Kalli had called and invited him out for the weekend.

Frank could take extra-sensory perception or leave it alone. But he had come to see Kalli. Davall had talked him into taking part in one test.

Trying to catch the thoughts of a stranger downstairs! The man who sends a telepathic message is known as an agent. Those who receive the message are percipients. He, Frank Bruce, had ceased to be Frank Bruce and was now a percipient. It sounded like the number of inches of water that had fallen on a given area in a given time. Or the hero of a novel by William Saroyan.

A new man was in the study downstairs concentrating on some subject known only to himself and Davall. No one else in the house had more than glimpsed him. Davall had gone into New York late in the afternoon and returned with the man who was whisked into the study without being introduced to anyone. Davall had said his name was Sax Britt but had refused all other information.

Frank scrawled an X on the sheet of paper and wished he was downstairs with a book. He had no desire to be part of a telepathic experiment. Or any other kind of experiment.

X marks the spot, he thought. Murder cliche number one. Some day, when he stopped murdering for the radio, he would list all of the murder cliches. Such as the idea that a murder victim was always the one man in a group who most deserved to be killed. That would nominate Joyce in this group.

Or the idea that dark and stormy nights were the time for murder and violence. Stormy nights were for planning murder, but never for committing it. Murder should be committed on clear, moonlit nights when a man's passions could race along, unhampered by the elements.

Did such thoughts mean that the telepathic message was about murder? Maybe the new agent was an undiscovered murderer. Or a potential one. But then they were all potential murderers.

This last thought interested Frank far more than the prospect of reading someone's mind. It had possibilities. He drew the sheet of paper to him and jotted down each of the potential murderers.

Martin Joyce. Ruthless. Dominant. He would kill anyone who stood in his way or who threatened his way of life. He would kill quickly and with violence.

Kalli Walker. She couldn't kill anyone . . . But she might, if someone or something she loved were menaced. But she would do it blindly and with the first thing that came to hand.

Robert Davall. A searcher. One-track mind. He might kill if his integrity were attacked. He would do it cleverly, probably inventing a locked room and giving the whole thing an air of pulling a rabbit from a hat.

Philip Langdon. Another single track mind. An expert on extrasensory perception. A logical mind. He might kill if the pattern of his life were upset. But he'd do it neatly and with precision.

Sidney Wilson. Another expert, but a yes-man. A rabbit man. But even rabbits will kill. He would kill only if it were the course of least resistance—when it would be easier to kill than to face something else.

Renee Lee. A blonde chorus girl, interested in very little besides sex. If she killed, it would be emotionally—and bloodily.

Helen Peterson. Cool and calculating. A bitch with culture. A debutante. She would do anything to achieve her ends. Murder too. But it would be done coolly and with finesse.

Sax Britt. An unknown quantity.

The servants. Also unknown. But they might kill someone like Joyce, who probably mistreats them.

Frank Bruce. Might commit murder if—

He stopped writing and laughed. Then he tore the sheet of paper into tiny pieces and dropped them one by one into the wastebasket. He wrote his name at the top of another sheet.

How did one concentrate on receiving the thoughts of a man who was concentrating on sending them? He gazed at the blank sheet of paper but it remained blank.

Funny how Sax Britt had looked surprised when he entered the house—as though he had glimpsed someone he knew, but hadn't expected to see, in the few seconds he could see into the other room. And someone had gasped. But who? Or should he say whom? A hell of a note when a writer didn't know whether to say who or whom. Or was it? Anyway, there was somebody who knew Sax Britt and had been recognized by him. But, so what? Britt was interested in extra-sensory perception and so were most of these people. Not so strange if they had met before. Maybe they had read minds together.

It was silly. There was a war on, with thousands upon thousands of men—and women and children—spewing their guts out on forgotten soil while here a group of people played at a game of reading minds.

War, too, was silly despite all of its gargantuan tragedy. When he wrote a play, he had to be careful that his hero wasn't a draft dodger. The hero had to have a bunch of bedridden old grandmothers to support or else be dashing about with a bad heart or ulcers. How could a hero be heroic with gastric ulcers? "I love you, darling. Will you marry me and my ulcers?"

War's silly in other ways. Men use it to get away from nagging wives and make new conquests; women use it to smear themselves with grease or to try to go to London or China where they could collect lice and crawl into strange beds. Like the red-headed editor he'd met. Jane. That was her name. Men use war to make more money or get more power. Politicians use it to get rid of young opponents. "My worthy opponent is a draft dodger. Don't vote for him!" A mad scramble over a towering mound of bodies. The things back of war are serious, but war is silly.

Sometimes—most times—people were silly. Like all these people sitting downstairs before the test started and competing with their silly little egos. Discussing all the technical sides of telepathy, arguing which was the right way to read minds, babbling about the new agent.

Maybe it was Helen Peterson who gasped when Britt entered. Maybe he was an old lover. Or maybe it had merely been someone with indigestion.

How long did it take for a telepathic message to get through? War Communications couldn't exert priorities on the lanes of telepathic communications.

He was bored with telepathy. There were only two bright spots in the weekend prospects. One was Kalli, she with the flame hair.

The other was a guest who was expected. Kalli had told him about the guest earlier. Chariman Fosdick Van Dyke, known to his hundreds of intimates as Fuzzy, was coming later that night. Chariman Fosdick "Fuzzy" Van Dyke, critic, lecturer, raconteur and expert on historical murders, who broadcast weekly as *The Village Gossip.*

Known from Calcutta to Hollywood and on to New York and the barren plains of Boston for his dicta on literary and dramatic tastes, Van Dyke was equally known for hurling insults to the left and right as he strode on his Olympian way.

He was coming to meet Davall, and Frank was looking forward to meeting him.

Frank crumpled up another sheet of paper, covered with meaningless doodles, and tossed it into the wastebasket. He threw the pencil on the desk and stared moodily out through the window. An owl hesitated in its flight to stare insolently back at him and then fluttered on its way.

He was so bored by the whole idea of mental telepathy that he was almost glad to hear the piercing shriek that suddenly knifed its way up from the floor below. It was a scream of mortal terror! It was the scream of a woman!

CHAPTER TWO

Maybe it was Kalli. Frank's headlong dash carried him through the hallway, past doors just beginning to pop open, and down the stairs. She was still screaming. He wheeled toward the big study and rushed in. It was dark. Nothing but darkness and that scream. From beyond the study, he heard a thump as if someone stumbled into furniture. There was soft swearing. His nerves jangled with the screaming. He reached for the light switch to the floor lamp.

Renee Lee stood in the center of the room, one hand up to her face, the other hand stretched out stiffly in front of her. The fingertips of that hand were red, sticky red. She still screamed, like a steam whistle stuck at the same note, while she stared across the room.

Frank followed the direction of her gaze and felt a sudden churning in the pit of his stomach—although what he saw was no different than the things he wrote about every day.

The body was slumped in an overstuffed chair in the corner of the room. The merciless glare of the lamp beside the chair reflected from the waxen face. Frank thought crazily that its light might have been kinder to the dead face.

He saw a small, slender man who must have looked like thousands of other men when he was alive. His face—a pleasant, ordinary enough face—was frozen in an expression of surprise. There was a horrible gaping wound where his left eye had been and bloody tears had streaked down his face. The left cheek was slashed as the weapon had slipped. On the floor was a pair of scissors, the red-stained blades mute evidence of how he had received the death wound.

Frank was conscious that others were crowding in behind him and that Davall had come in through the door leading from the porch. They were all quiet, almost too quiet, but the screaming of Renee Lee went on and on. Davall suddenly crossed the room and there was the sharp crack of his hand against her face. She sucked her breath in with a sob, but the screaming stopped. She stared with shock-filled eyes at the body across the room.

"Who is he?" somebody asked, and it was several seconds before Frank realized that he was the questioner.

"Sax Britt," Davall answered grimly. "Who found him? You?" He was looking at Renee Lee.

She nodded dumbly.

"How?" Frank had never seen Davall look so grim.

"I—I slipped downstairs," Renee said, biting her lower lip. "I was afraid—afraid that you wouldn't want me to keep on in the tests unless I made better scores. So I thought I could slip downstairs and maybe learn what thoughts he was supposed to be sending." Renee was still pale but she had herself under better control.

"Some people think that sex appeal will get them anything!" It was the cold voice of Helen Peterson in back of Frank.

"You ought to know," flashed Renee, the murder forgotten at the prospect of a clash.

"Stop it," Davall ordered. "What happened, Renee?"

"I came in the room and called Mr. Britt's name. I didn't want to fool around with any lights because I knew you were out on the porch. He didn't answer. I thought maybe he had fallen asleep, so I felt my way across the room. Suddenly my fingers—touched something sticky—sticky and warm . . ." She opened her mouth to scream again, but a movement of Davall's arm choked it back in her throat. She started shivering.

"Is everybody here?" Davall asked, swinging around to face the others.

Frank looked around. They were all there, clustered together as though for protection, near the door. Kalli—his adorable Kalli, he thought—was staring at Renee Lee, with sympathy in her eyes. Martin Joyce had a look of disapproval on his face, perhaps because Sax Britt had had the bad taste to spill his blood out on Joyce's rug. Langdon was gazing around the room with bright eyes—probably hoping to catch the thoughts of the murderer. Sidney Wilson looked as if he might get sick any minute. Helen Peterson was pale, but still very much the cold, well-controlled debutante.

"Were all of you in your rooms when she screamed?" Davall asked.

"Assuredly! Naturally we were all—all—er—that is—" Sidney Wilson's voice trailed off. His head tilted, bird-like, to one side as his eyes scrambled around the room looking for an out. "Ah—that is—I'm only speaking for—er—myself," he finished lamely.

"How about the rest of you?" Davall asked.

They all nodded.

"I think I was the first one out," Frank added. "I heard the scream and I thought at first that it might be Kalli, so I ran downstairs."

"Look here, Davall," Martin Joyce said rather testily, "must we stay in here with that corpse? It's rather messy and I'm sure it's not too enjoyable for the girls."

"Of course not," Davall said. "I was just going to suggest that all of you go into the living room and wait."

"Wait for what?" Renee asked. The color was coming back into her face and she had regained her composure, although she studiously avoided looking in the direction of the corner.

"The police. I'm going upstairs and collect the sheets of paper from the rooms. Kalli, you call the White Plains police and tell them there's been a murder here. Then you join the others, in the living room."

Davall turned and walked from the room. The others followed, leaving the large study entirely in the possession of the corpse.

CHAPTER THREE

Frank turned from blindly staring at an autographed picture of a movie star and gazed at the others in the study. They were all unusually quiet. But it wasn't the quiet produced by death striking suddenly into a group. They hadn't known Sax Britt—except perhaps for the one person whom Britt seemed to recognize when he arrived—so his death was very impersonal. The violence had shocked them for the moment, but that would soon pass. The present quiet came from the thought, which must be shared by them all, that one of their number was a murderer.

Martin Joyce pulled himself out of his thoughts, with an almost visible effort, and walked over to Frank.

"Sorry a thing like this had to happen on your first visit up here," he said. "It's a bit of a shock even though none of us knew the fellow." His voice was soft, a fact which always surprised everyone. He was a short, stocky man who looked as if he were about to speak in a booming voice.

"Someone must have known him," Frank said.

"No doubt. I should guess someone followed him out from town and then entered the house as soon as we went upstairs." He spoke in a manner of dismissing the whole unpleasant subject. "Miss Walker tells me that you're quite a good playwright. Had a play on Broadway last year, didn't you?"

"That's right," Frank said.

"Doing another one?"

"It's already finished. Buell called me yesterday and said it's going into rehearsal next week."

"Good man, Buell. I'll call him in the morning and see if he wants any more money in it."

When the conversation of Frank and Joyce had switched away from the murder, the others had turned and seized upon it as though grabbing a life preserver. Like Joyce, they were carefully shoving the unpleasant subject into the background.

"Any part in that play for a good chorus girl?" Renee Lee asked. When she had entered the room, she had automatically dropped into a large overstuffed chair. As usual, she was consciously unaware that her dress had slid up far enough to guarantee her a fair amount of attention without the necessity of entering into conversations. One hand rested against her blonde hair as her eyes invited Frank. There was scarcely the slightest hint in the back of her blue eyes that it was only a few minutes since that same hand had been dipped in blood.

"Careful, Renee," Joyce said, smiling mechanically. "You'll have Miss Walker in your hair if she catches you looking at him like that."

"That might be fun," Renee answered. "There's too much attention being paid to my mind."

"I'm sure it's a new experience," murmured Helen Peterson. She had the type of beauty that went with such retorts—cold and classical. A black gown boldly etched the outlines of her figure.

Sidney Wilson cocked his head on one side and stared quizzically at the two girls as though they spoke in a foreign tongue. Then he dismissed them with a bird-like gesture and turned eagerly to Langdon. A touch of extra paleness in his sallow cheeks was the only hint that he hadn't forgotten the thing that sprawled in the next room.

"I was very much interested in your remarks about the source of a message," he said. "I wonder if you'd mind continuing from where you left off when we went upstairs to start the experiment?"

Philip Langdon hesitated, running his fingers through the great shock of white hair. The lines in his face were drawn sharper by seriousness, making him look even more like a devout member of the clergy. "I'm not sure that I should," he said. "It does seem rather out of place considering—what has taken place."

"Nonsense," said Martin Joyce. "Naturally, the little incident is regrettable, but there is no reason why we shouldn't continue in a normal vein. I'm sure we mourn the loss, in a detached way, of a man who apparently was making great contributions to the science of telepathy, but there can't be much emotion over a perfect stranger. Continue, by all means, Langdon."

"Well," said Langdon, obviously equally glad to move on to surer and more pleasant grounds, "since you insist." He swung into his subject as though picking up the thread of thought at the exact spot where it had terminated. "The fact that we do not distinguish the source of a message when there are many agents can be explained by the hypothesis of the psychic world in which all take part. In that way the problem of direction is replaced by one of meeting within the psychic world.

"As I see it, the situation has been well stated in philosophic terms by Bergson: 'The truth is that the point P, the rays which it emits, the retina and the nervous elements affected, form a single whole; that the luminous point P is a part of this whole; and that it is really in P, and not elsewhere, that the image of P is formed and perceived.' "

"Sounds like a dirty joke in double talk to me," Renee said.

"The role of the parapsychologist," Langdon said acidly, "is more difficult because the best results are often obtained through using persons with a minimum of imagination."

"Touche," Helen Peterson said.

"I get it," Renee said. "I'm off beat again. I'm just not in the groove on Point P."

"You really shouldn't, my dear," admonished Sidney Wilson, tilting his head to one side.

"In spite of her rather excellent showing in the tests," continued Langdon, "I'm rather afraid that Miss Lee is dominated by monoideaism, directed toward the physical rather than the mental. As I was about to say, considering telepathy as a phenomenon analogous to acoustic resonance, which may be spontaneous, I am often reminded of that most excellent example cited by Mme. Bisson in an issue of Psychics way back in 1923. . . ."

Renee Lee yawned.

Mentally, Frank joined her. At the same time, he was conscious of a feeling of revulsion that they could so calmly discuss the esoteric side of telepathy when in the next room a man's violated blood was barely congealed.

"Quite right, quite right," Sidney Wilson said eagerly. "I remember that well. It was a case of duplication of physical and psychical situations. Very good. And, of course, brings us to the question of why two brains in accord should not also vibrate in unison."

Langdon nodded, running his fingers through his white hair.

"But we mustn't forget Maxwell's hypothesis," he said.

"Exactly, exactly," Wilson said quickly, his head bobbing. "That's exactly what I've always said. We mustn't forget Maxwell's hypothesis!"

"I'm afraid," Martin Joyce interrupted, "that you're over my head. You forget, gentlemen, that the rest of us here are rank amateurs in the field of telepathic investigation. It is true, of course, that I know a little about it, due to my connection with the Telepathology Machine, but it's still too deep for me. You must be patient with us."

"That's it," agreed Wilson. "Patience is the key-word for us all. That's just what I was saying to Mr. Davall only yesterday. Patience is the key-word. Don't you agree, Mr. Langdon?"

"Oh, nuts," said Renee Lee. "It's bad enough listening to you two guys give out with that stuff ordinarily, but I'd think you'd have enough respect not to keep talking about it practically over the cooling body of poor Mr. Britt. It ain't decent!"

Frank didn't wait to hear the answer to Renee's outburst. He had slowly edged nearer to the doorway and now he stepped into the hall and opened the front door. He stepped out on the porch and pulled the door shut.

The lawn lights illuminated the huge lawn as brightly as though it were day, but beyond the circle of light there was only darkness—darkness and silence, except for the night noises of the country and the occasional hum of a distant car.

Somewhere on the estate a dog bayed at the moon and a nearby cricket chirruped a defiant answer.

The hum of a car drew nearer and twin lights suddenly swept in front of the house and there was a slamming of a door. Then the car ground into action and vanished down the road. Gravel crunched as someone walked towards the house.

A moment later an apparition strode into the circle of light and advanced upon Frank. It was a man, but such a man as is seldom seen. He was big, in the same sense that one would speak of a circus tent as big. He was so tall that his head almost brushed the limbs of the lawn trees, a good five inches over six feet from the ground. Without being fat, the man would have been gargantuan. But he was fat, with a rounded stomach that spoke of succulent meals indefinitely prolonged. He had the smooth, rosy-cheeked face of a petulant cherub. Horn-rimmed glasses perched on his nose, looking more like a refuge from, than an aid to sight. He wore baggy flannels and a barrel-like sport coat that would have put a rainbow to shame.

"Don't stand there gaping like a drunken cobra," the apparition snapped. "I don't expect intelligence but you can at least exhibit animation. The arriving guest is greeted by an idiotic youth instead of the gay hospitality which fresh air fiends are always carping about. Why are you standing out here mooning at the sky instead of exchanging inanities with the telepathic morons who must be cluttering up the house?"

"Sometimes I enjoy being by myself," answered Frank.

"Leave your sex life out of the conversation."

"From the tone of your voice," said Frank, "I'd guess you must be Chariman Van Dyke."

"Chariman Fosdick Van Dyke, you guttersnipe! The most brilliant personality of the times and you have to guess! I asked you why you aren't in with the other morons trying to find out how one feeble brain can communicate with another without speaking?"

"Maybe I'm not interested in telepathy."

"Then you must be the delivery boy for the brothel that serves Martin Joyce. No one else would voluntarily come here."

"I'm a playwright," Frank said.

"God!" exclaimed Van Dyke, clapping a hand to his forehead. "Am I to be spared nothing? I suppose you've just written a first play that was just made for Hays and you want me to read it?"

"No. I wrote my first play last year and it was produced."

"Then all the critics said that it was terrible and you want me to prove that they were a pack of idiots?"

"On the contrary," Frank said, beginning to enjoy himself, "they liked it, although it didn't make much money. Burns gave it three stars and George Jean Nathan said that it was a contribution to the theatre. Every *literate* critic had something nice to say about it."

"I can't keep track of every piece of drivel that's produced as entertainment in the local bawdy houses," growled Van Dyke. "You must have written a second play which you want me to read?"

"I've written it and it goes into rehearsal next week."

"You mean you want nothing?"

"No more than the pleasure of your company."

"I'll have none of your pretty ways. In some way I'll eventually have to pay for these few minutes of boredom. There must be some reason why you invaded these sacrosanct halls of sham!"

"Sham?" Frank asked.

"You don't think Martin Joyce is backing these experiments for the love of it, do you?" demanded Van Dyke indignantly. "Joyce backs shows because he likes to roll comely young chorus girls in the feathers! You can wager your first dollar, if you've earned it yet, that he's backing telepathy because he sees a way of increasing his take in the vineyard of Francis Gall!"

"Who is Francis Gall?" Frank asked.

"Francis Joseph Gall," Van Dyke said in his best radio voice, "was born in the Grand Duchy of Baden in the fall of 1758. A long-suffering humanity let him grow up to invent a backhouse science that explained bumps on the head, since known as phrenology. But it took Martin Joyce to cash in on it."

"You mean he tells fortunes?"

"*Makes,* not tells. Martin Joyce is the proud inventor of an infernal contraption which he calls a Telepathology Meter and which his advertising writers boldly claim will interpret the bumps on your head in a flash."

"That's news to me," Frank said. "Very interesting."

"While you dawdle over your belated education," Van Dyke continued furiously, "am I supposed to stand here in the yard and gaze at your revolting features? It's bad enough that I'm not greeted with some little surprise in keeping with the importance of my visit!"

"But we do have a surprise for you," Frank said, suddenly remembering the events of the past hour.

"O-ho," cried Van Dyke. "What's happened? Out with it, you perverted peddler of words!"

"There's apparently been a murder."

"What a way to welcome a guest," complained Van Dyke. "Anything to entertain me, eh? Or is this that bedraggled coin-palmer's idea of a joke?"

"It's no joke, Fuzzy," said Davall. He had stepped out on the porch without being noticed by either of them. "A man was murdered. A man who, apparently, knew no one here and was known by no one here. That should be enough to arouse your morbid sense of curiosity. Come into the study where the others are waiting. Kalli called the White Plains police and they should be here any minute."

CHAPTER FOUR

The butler hurried from the kitchen and opened the door to let them in. There were four of them. Two young men carried an assortment of mysterious-looking paraphernalia and an older man carried the small black case that marked him as the Medical Examiner. It was the fourth one who stepped into the living room. He, too, was young, looking more like a moderately successful business man than a detective.

"Where is it?" he asked. The question was addressed to no one in particular.

"Straight ahead of you," Davall answered. "I'll show you."

"We'll find it," the detective answered. "Just relax."

"It's straight ahead from the door, where the light is," Davall added, sinking back in his chair.

The detective nodded and the four men disappeared toward the large study. The butler went uncertainly back to the kitchen.

Frank brushed back an unruly lock of hair and glanced around the room for the hundredth time.

He had long since arrived at one conclusion. There were two implications in the murder. The first was that one person in this group was a homicidal maniac and had killed for the pure love of killing. That thought, he had to admit, was slightly fantastic. If true, it likely would have resulted in murder before this. The second implication was that someone among those in the house had lied when he said that the new arrival was unknown to him. Frank was sure there was something he should remember but it managed to elude him.

The others apparently had followed much the same reasoning. Their attempts to crowd the murder from their thoughts had failed. There seemed to be no doubt that one of their number was a murderer. But which one?

That question hung in the air like a two-edged sword. It pressed down on them like an intangible weight. It moved silently among them and became a solid obstruction. It introduced a new guest into the house:—Fear!

Several times Frank had surveyed the faces of the others in the room and each time had caught one of them surveying his. And on each face was stamped the mark of fear. Who was to say which was the fear of being discovered and which was the fear of rubbing elbows with a murderer?

Martin Joyce sat stiffly upright, his eyes carefully veiled until he thought he was unobserved. His face was gray, his lips pale. Relieved of the burden of acting mine jolly host, his jowls sagged. He looked old.

Helen Peterson sat beside him. Her light skin—almost too light—framed by black hair and black gown, seemed transparent. Her blue eyes were dazed.

A bird finds her nest rifled and fearfully looks for the despoiler. That was Sidney Wilson, even more pronouncedly birdlike as his gaze darted from one to another of the occupants of the room.

Philip Langdon's white hair stood on end as he continued to run his hands through it. He glanced uncertainly around, stilled finally by the intrusion of something that loomed larger than his thoughts upon telepathy.

Davall looked ill, his eyes staring blankly ahead as though still seeing the thing in the other room. His fingers toyed nervously with a coin.

For once Renee Lee wasn't bored, but she acted as though she found no more enjoyment in this state than in the former one. A dozen times she had been on the point of speaking but had swallowed the words just before they emerged.

Kalli's hand rested in Frank's and occasionally he could feel her tremble as she drew a deep breath. He pressed her hand, in lovers' silent communion and she relaxed.

Chariman Van Dyke alone seemed completely unperturbed. He was relaxed comfortably in the biggest chair in the room, peering eagerly over the top of his shell-rimmed glasses. The expression on his face was even more cherubic as he contemplated and dissected. Twice he cleared his throat with vague abortive rumblings.

"Who called us?" It was the young detective back in the room.

"My secretary," Davall answered, looking up. There was a tangible relief in the room at the detective's appearance.

"Who found the stiff?"

"Miss Lee," Davall answered again.

"Who are you?"

"Davall."

"The magician, eh?" the detective said, glancing at the hands that manipulated a coin. He glanced around the room until his gaze came to Joyce.

"You're Martin Joyce, aren't you?" he asked.

"That's right, officer," Joyce answered, regaining some of his composure. "May I ask your name?"

"Sure," the detective said, lighting a cigarette. He glanced at Renee Lee. "Lieutenant Crosbie . . . Lieutenant Dick Crosbie," he added, looking toward Renee again.

"Naturally, I don't mean to cast any reflection on you, Lieutenant," Joyce said smoothly, "but I was under the impression that the Medical Examiner is in charge of murder cases in Westchester County."

"How do you know it's murder?"

Joyce lost a little of his assurance. "Why, I—that is it looked like murder. So it isn't murder?"

"It's murder all right," Crosbie said. "I just want to know what made you so sure."

"Then isn't the Medical Examiner supposed to be in charge?" Joyce asked. He seemed a little annoyed.

"He is—technically," Crosbie answered, grinning. "But he wants to get back to a pinochle game. I don't like pinochle. He isn't ambitious. I am. So I ask questions, you answer them, he plays pinochle and everybody's happy except the murderer."

Another plainclothesman slipped into the room and unobstrusively flipped open a notebook. Lieutenant Crosbie gave no indication of seeing him, but his manner changed.

"You knew the corpse, Mr. Davall?" he asked.

"That's right."

"Who was he?"

"His name was Sax Britt," Davall said slowly, "but outside of that I can't tell you who he was."

"What do you mean?"

"No one here knew him. He was a complete stranger to everyone here with the exception of myself and I only met him at seven o'clock tonight—which means I was acquainted with him a little over two hours."

"Now wait a minute," Crosbie said. "You're trying to tell me that nobody in this house knew the guy and yet he's murdered!"

"A social introduction is not necessary in order to commit murder," Van Dyke said acidly. He resented being deprived of the floor for such a long time.

"Nuts," Crosbie answered. "If he was such a complete stranger, that means no motive. And, unless somebody here is ready for the booby bin, there has to be a motive."

Van Dyke heaved himself up out of the chair and glared at the detective.

"Young man," he said, "your gross ignorance is only exceeded by your crass stupidity! He could have been killed because someone disliked the color of his necktie—if he wore one. Thomas Griffiths Wainewright killed his sister-in-law because she had thick ankles. John Watson Laurie stood upon a mountain, like St. Stephen, and stoned his best friend to death to gain a watch which he threw away, a railway ticket which he never used, and a pound which he didn't need. Wallace, the Liverpool murderer, killed his wife because he could no longer stand her voice. Dr. Neill Cream prescribed poisonous pills for pallid prostitutes for the sole reason that it afforded him amusement. Motive, my belly button!"

"Who are you?" Lieutenant Crosbie demanded.

"He's Chariman Van Dyke," Davall said quickly. "Be careful or you'll burst a blood vessel, Fuzzy," he added to Van Dyke who was glaring wrathfully at the wretch who failed to recognize him.

"Sorry I didn't recognize you," Crosbie said, more respect in his voice. "I understand that you're quite an expert on murder."

"Hah!" snorted Van Dyke, partly mollified. "Young man, if you live to be a hundred and three and practically slobber with information, you won't know as much about murder as I do."

Lieutenant Crosbie quickly fled to the protection of the present case.

"You," he said, turning to Davall, "seem to be the only one who knew the murdered man and the only one who has any answers, so suppose you tell me just what happened."

Davall's nervousness had vanished and his normal color was returning, although the coin still twinkled in and out of his hands.

"I'd better start at the beginning. For the past week, I've been conducting tests here in telepathy."

"You mean you're trying to expose it," Crosbie interrupted.

"No. Don't confuse this with my exposure of fake mediums. There is little doubt that telepathy is a valid phenomenon. It has been proved by dozens of scientific experiments. I have been interested in the subject for some time. Mr. Joyce recently became interested in telepathy too and generously offered to back an experiment out here."

"Okay, it's on the level. Go ahead with your story."

"I was about to do so," Davall said. "We started the tests a week ago with six percipients and one agent. The agent is the one who sends the telepathic message and the percipients are the ones who receive. We have been having fairly successful results, although I wasn't too satisfied with the agent we were using. About three days ago I got a letter from Sax Britt who claimed that he had been getting unusual results as an agent, working in a self-imposed hypnotic state. It sounded worth trying, so I made an appointment with him for late this afternoon. I drove the agent we'd been using into town and returned with Mr. Britt. We arrived just a few minutes before eight and I took him right into the large study."

"Why?" Crosbie asked.

"I wanted to see what the result would be if there had been no contact between the agent and percipients. Mr. Britt assured me that he had never met any of these people. I believe that everyone here had a brief glimpse of him as we entered the foyer, so I asked them if they had ever seen him or heard his name."

"They hadn't?"

"No. Mr. Joyce did remark that Britt had looked slightly familiar but dismissed it as a coincidence when he heard the name."

"Go on."

"As I said, I took Mr. Britt right into the large study. Then I came back and suggested that the percipients go upstairs and get ready to receive the message as it was almost eight o'clock. The test was to be from eight to nine."

"Everyone went upstairs immediately?"

"Only the percipients," Davall said. "Frank was included, however, for this test."

"And who is Frank?"

Davall indicated him.

"Frank Bruce is his full name," he said. "He is here as a week-end guest because he is engaged to Miss Walker, my secretary, who is also one of the percipients. Normally, he wouldn't be taking part in the tests."

"We'll come to that later. Go on."

"As soon as they had all gone upstairs," Davall said, "I went back into the study and told Britt the object he was to think about. Up to that time, no one knew except myself. Britt had already picked a comfortable spot to sit and he turned out the light as I left. I went into the kitchen and asked the butler to bring me a cup of coffee into the dining room. I sat in there, drinking the coffee, until about eight-thirty, maybe a little later. Then I went through the library and out on the porch. I stayed there until I heard Miss Lee scream, shortly before nine o'clock."

"You knew it was Miss Lee screaming?"

"Not at first. I ran into the study, arriving about the same time as Frank, who turned on the light. Britt was in the chair, as you just saw him, and Miss Lee was into the middle of the room, facing the body and screaming. I herded everyone into the living room and had Miss Walker call you."

"You touched nothing in the room?"

"No."

"That was smart," Crosbie said, nodding. "That covers the whole thing from your angle, does it?"

"Except for one other thing," Davall said. "I collected all the slips of paper from the percipients. I don't know just how, but it may be of some help."

"I'll look at them later," Crosbie said. "The murder had to take place between eight and nine. That fits in with the Medical Examiner's statement that he had been dead between thirty minutes and two hours. It's nine-thirty now. Mr. Davall, you know the house well. I wonder if you'd make me a rough sketch of both upstairs and downstairs while I ask the others a few questions?"

"That won't be necessary," Martin Joyce said. "You'll find blueprints of both in the left top drawer of a desk in the small study there."

"Will you get them for me, Mr. Davall?" Crosbie asked. He turned back to Joyce as Davall nodded and got up.

"You first, Mr. Joyce. You went upstairs with the others at eight o'clock?"

"That's right."

"What part of the upstairs?"

"To my room."

"You were there all the time between eight and nine when Mr. Davall called you?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anyone else during that time?"

"No."

"Did you hear anyone?"

"No."

"Okay. What is your name, Miss?" His question was directed towards the dark-haired girl next to Joyce.

"Helen Peterson."

"You went upstairs at the same time as the others and went to your room?"

"Yes."

"You were in your room all the time?"

"Naturally," she said. "That was the purpose in going up. I assure you I'm not in the habit of wandering out of my room and murdering people. I think all this questioning is in rather bad taste. I'm sure none of us killed this what's-his-name."

"Murder isn't exactly a required function of the Four Hundred either," Crosbie said grimly. "Or is it? Did you see anyone else or hear anything while you were in your room?"

"No."

"Your name?" Crosbie asked Langdon.

"Philip Langdon."

"You followed the same procedure as the others in going to your room?"

"I did."

"Did you hear anything or see anyone between eight and nine?"

"No."

"You weren't out of your room?"

"I was not."

"And your name?"

"Sidney Wilson," the little man said, tilting his head to one side and looking up. "It is a most perplexing case, isn't it, Officer?"

"I wouldn't say that—yet," Crosbie answered. "You also went directly to your room and stayed there, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

"And you heard nothing and saw no one?"

"Nothing quite like that. But I believe I caught a few of the murderer's thought waves, which must mean he was concentrating on the murder terribly hard. But then I suppose murderers are always intense, aren't they? I was just saying—"

Lieutenant Crosbie cut off the flow of talk.

"What do you mean you caught thought waves of the murderer?"

"I distinctly saw two eyes and I'm sure they were filled with hate. So it must have been the murderer's."

"I think," Davall said, having come back in with the blue prints, "that Mr .Wilson caught even more than he realizes, Lieutenant. In fact, I believe some of the others did too. I'll show you later."

"Okay," Crosbie said, but he looked skeptical. He shifted his attention from Wilson.

Renee Lee was not unconscious of the fact that the good-looking young detective had looked at her several times. It hadn't been entirely a gaze brought about by her having found the body, a fact which had done much to restore her natural spirits. So she met his eyes with a smile and answered his first question before it was asked.

"I'm Renee Lee," she said and looked as if she might be on the point of adding her phone number.

"You went up to your room at the same time as the others, Miss Lee?" Crosbie asked. His expression indicated that his mind was not entirely on the business in hand.

"Yes," she said. "I had to, since I'm part of the test. But to tell the truth, I was getting a little tired of sitting up there every day and trying to catch thought waves. The thoughts were never interesting, if you know what I mean."

"If the Lieutenant doesn't know what you mean, dear, then he's the only one," Helen Peterson said.

Crosbie glared at her before asking his next question.

"You discovered the body, Miss Lee?"

"Yes." Renee wet her lips with the tip of her tongue and just failed to suppress a shudder. "I—I touched him in the dark . . ."

"How did you happen to come downstairs?" Crosbie asked. "Weren't all of you supposed to stay upstairs until Davall called for you?"

"I guess so," Renee said. "I—I was afraid that I hadn't been doing well enough in the tests and that maybe if I didn't do better, they wouldn't want me to continue. Right now I'm at liberty—I'm in the theatre, you know—and I didn't want that to happen. So I came downstairs, hoping that Mr. Britt might give me just a little hint about the message. I suppose it was wrong of me . . ."

"Sounds natural," Crosbie said. "At least, it sounds normal to me. It shows that you didn't believe all this junk."

"I'll have you understand—" Langdon began indignantly, but the lieutenant cut him short.

"Save it, professor. You can tell me the whole story later. I don't suppose you saw or heard the murderer, did you, Miss Lee?"

"No. And I would have been just frightened to death if I had!"

"Okay. Now, your name, Miss?"

"Kalli Walker," Kalli said. "I'm Mr. Davall's secretary. I went directly to my room when the tests started and stayed there until I heard Renee scream. I heard nothing unusual until that."

The lieutenant turned to Frank. "You're Frank Bruce—is that right?"

"Yes."

"You were not a member of this household until tonight?"

"Right."

"You were invited out because you're engaged to Miss Walker?"

"Right."

"You didn't know the deceased?"

"No."

"What time did you get here?"

"About seven."

"And where were you between eight and nine?"

"In one of the upstairs rooms also," Frank said.

"Mr. Davall," Crosbie said, "you told me that you were in the dining room from eight to eight-thirty and then out on the porch until nine. Is that right?"

Davall nodded.

"Now, Mr. Van Dyke," Crosbie continued, "you got here at what time?"

"About fifteen minutes before you," Fuzzy Van Dyke said, chuckling. Evidently the questions and answers had restored his good humor—if it could be called that.

"Something amuses you?" Crosbie asked.

"Why not?" was the response. "You have eight people, all without alibis and with an equal lack of motive, who might have committed the murder, not counting the servants. Unless I miss my guess, young man, you're soon going to be back pounding a beat in the isolated sections of White Plains—if there is any one section more isolated than another."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Crosbie answered, grinning good-naturedly. "I'd like to know why you were here tonight. Is Mr. Joyce a friend of yours?"

"I have no friends," Fuzzy said promptly. "Only ungrateful acquaintances who beg me to visit them because they can't withstand my charm."

"Or because they haven't found a way to get rid of him short of poisoning," Frank couldn't resist adding.

"You have the manners of a Black Widow Spider," Van Dyke replied, glaring over the top of his glasses.

"I still haven't heard why you're here," Crosbie said.

"If you must know, I came here to visit that superannuated magician who prefers playing idiotic games to remaining in a civilized spot and enjoying man's improvements on nature."

"You like Davall then?"

"If I said I loathed him, you could consider it a passionate statement."

Crosbie laughed and swung around.

"One question I forgot to ask," he said. "Do any of you remember who was last in the hall when you went upstairs tonight?"

"I think I was," Helen Peterson said uncertainly. "Mr. Langdon and I have the last rooms down the hall, but he was ahead of me and entered his room first. I think I remember looking back down the hall and not seeing anyone."

"Okay. Now let's see the blue prints."

Davall handed them to him and he studied them silently. While waiting for him to take them, Davall had labeled each room and noted what person occupied each bedroom upstairs. After a quick inspection, Crosbie folded the papers and put them in his pocket.

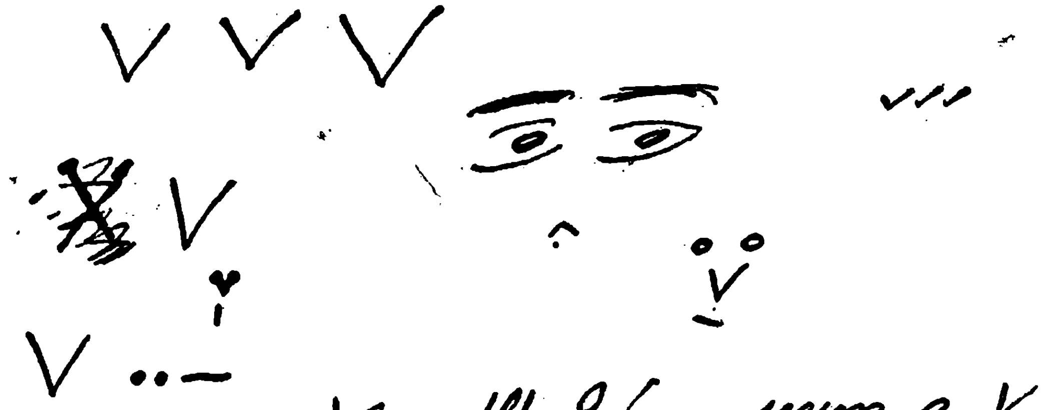
"What about the slips of paper you mentioned with all the thought messages?" he asked Davall.

The magician produced six sheets of paper and handed them over.

"You'll notice," he said, "that four of them apparently caught the thought waves of the murderer, one caught the thought waves of the murderer and the agent together, and one caught both thought waves separately. Frank failed to write down his thoughts. In a way, I think the answers may help set the time of the murder since the agent obviously had time to start sending his message."

"I doubt if that would be accepted in court," Crosbie said. He looked at the papers and frowned. "You'll have to explain these to me. They look like doodles to me. What was the message to be sent tonight?"

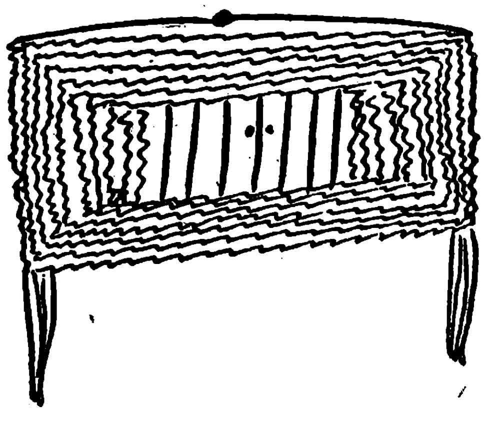
"Not really a message," corrected Davall. "Britt was to transmit the image of the Washington Monument. A simple thing, yet difficult for anyone to guess. You'll notice one person caught that thought wave almost perfectly. Give them to me one at a time and we'll see what we can make of them."

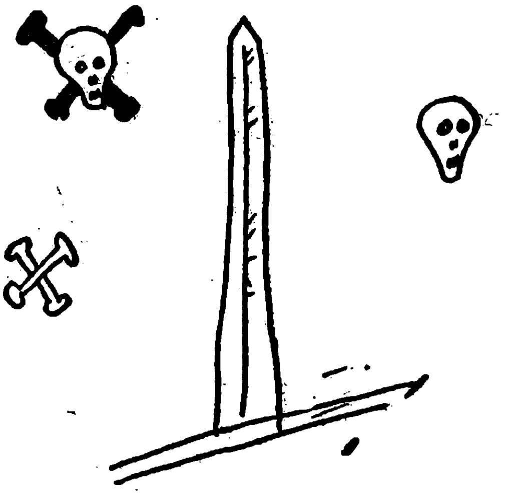


Very odd! I keep seeing a V, but somehow it looks as though there were two eyes above it! I can't understand what it can be!

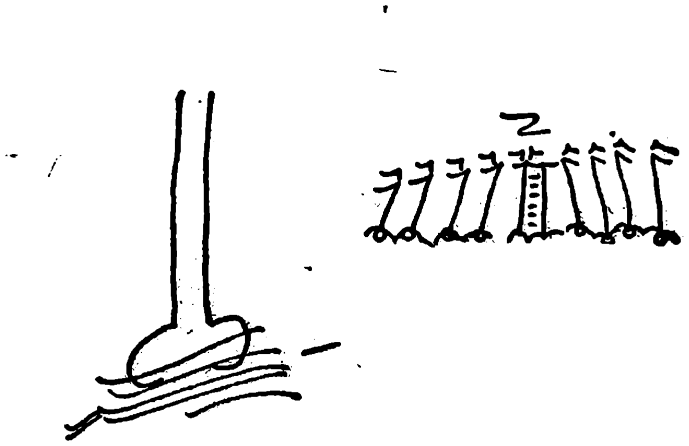
S.W.

÷ Helen Peterson ÷





FL



MJ

X

RENEE
LEE

r r

RL

Over the horizon

Frank

Mrs. Bruce

8:45

8:42

Frank

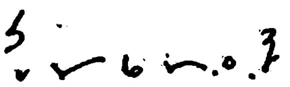
F + K = B

FB

KB

Over the horizon

####



KW

"Mr. Wilson," Davall said, taking the first one that Crosbie handed him, "I believe, caught the thought waves of the murderer very well. The V he kept seeing was undoubtedly the top section of the scissors. If you'll notice, a couple of times he got the complete picture more accurately—once, here in the corner, where he crossed it out and once in the small figure below and to the right of that which very closely resembles scissors. The eyes, instead of being the murderer's as he thought, were undoubtedly the eyes of the victim which were the murderer's target. In the remaining object Mr. Wilson tried to put the V and the eyes together to make a face."

"A most unfortunate habit of mine," Wilson sighed apologetically. "I simply must use more restraint."

"One thing I should point out, Lieutenant," Davall said, "is that in telepathy we seldom get an exact reproduction. Occasionally a more advanced percipient, like Mr. Langdon, will be able to, but usually we count it as success if the shape of an object is transmitted."

"Okay, go ahead," Crosbie said, lighting another cigarette.

Davall took the second sheet of paper.

"Miss Peterson evidently failed to get any message. The result was a little doodling, I should say. The object looks like either a picture or an article of furniture and can have no significance except as a pointer to her subconscious."

"I'm sure the lieutenant is not interested in my subconscious," Helen Peterson said coolly.

"Mr. Langdon," continued Davall, "was the most successful—as he has been in all our tests. I think we can safely say that he caught the thought of death in the murderer's mind and the shape of the weapon. The crossbones closely resemble a pair of shears. He also has a very accurate reproduction of the object which Britt was to concentrate upon. Very successful."

"Most gratifying, isn't it?" Sidney Wilson said, beaming at Langdon.

"It's still a murder case," Crosbie said dryly.

"Sorry," Davall said. He took the next paper. "Mr. Joyce is the one I mentioned who got both thought waves together. He has the general outlines of the monument and the addition at the bottom makes it also resemble the shears. The rest of it probably has no significance.

"Miss Lee also caught the shape of the scissors very well. She might have caught more, since she has had fairly successful results, but I imagine she got bored then and the rest is doodling. A few musical notes, her name in lights—I'd guess—and two faces.

"Miss Walker—" Davall stopped and grinned boyishly at Kalli and Frank—"was mostly occupied with thoughts brought on by the arrival of Frank. *Over The Horizon* is the name of his new play. Then she succumbed to the temptation to see how 'Mrs. Bruce' looked. It's possible that the triangular object in the middle was inspired by a brief glimpse of Britt's thought waves. Her conscience made her think of her job long enough to doodle some shorthand and then her thoughts went back to more personal matters. Nothing of any importance here—except to her."

Kalli flushed slightly and laughed.

"So what do you make of it?" Crosbie asked.

"I would say that the only definite clue concerns the time," Davall said. "Since at least two people caught the thought waves from Britt, enough time must have elapsed for him to concentrate on the subject. I would think that would place the murder near eight-thirty."

"It might also mean that the murderer was experienced in telepathy since they caught his thoughts so thoroughly too."

"Not necessarily, although you might advance that as a theory."

"Then I do," Crosbie said promptly. "But there is something else missing."

"What?"

"You have six sheets here," Crosbie said slowly, "yet there were seven people taking part in the test."

"That's true," Davall admitted.

There was a short silence. Frank was suddenly conscious that they were all looking at him.

"What happened to your sheet, Bruce?" Crosbie demanded.

"I tore it—or rather, them up," Frank said. "I scribbled on several sheets, but the scribblings had nothing to do with the test, so I tore the sheets up and tossed them back into the wastebasket."

Lieutenant Crosbie's eyes shifted questioningly to Davall.

"I'm sorry, Frank," Davall said, "but there weren't any sheets in the wastebasket. I made a point of looking there. I always do. Many times a percipient will tear up something which he thinks is unimportant, whereas it actually is very important. The basket in your room was empty."

Frank felt a sinking in the pit of his stomach. His mind grappled with the problem but the only memory was one of tearing up sheets of paper and tossing them into the basket.

"I'll come back to that point in just a minute," Crosbie said ominously. "In the meantime, there are two other things that occur to me. I'm surprised you haven't thought of them."

"I was wondering how long it would take you to stumble over that," grumbled Van Dyke.

"What do you mean?" Davall asked.

"First," Crosbie said carefully, "if we accept the fact that four people caught thought waves from the murderer while the crime was being committed, then the murderer must be either Miss Peterson, Miss Walker, Mr. Bruce or yourself. That is almost too convenient a weeding out of suspects. It strikes me that the murderer might be smart enough to have drawn some thought waves on his pad."

"It seems to me you're making a mistake," Sidney Wilson said, "in assuming that the murderer must necessarily be someone in the house. A very definite mistake. It might have been someone who followed him out here."

"Or one of the servants," suggested Helen Peterson.

"The servants will be questioned," Crosbie said, "but I think we can count them out. As for an outsider, it would be rather difficult for such a person to know when everyone else would be in other parts of the house. Besides, I'm sure we can eliminate that possibility."

"You mean you have some idea as to the identity of the murderer?" Martin Joyce asked.

"Yes," Crosbie said cheerfully. "Now I'd like to get a sample of everyone's fingerprints. As you probably know, I can't force you to give me your prints, but I think it might be best if you cooperated."

His tone implied that anyone refusing could be considered guilty. No one refused.

The third detective had also entered the room with a handful of equipment. He appropriated the nearest table and looked up expectantly. When no one else made the first move, Davall stepped up, a slight smile on his face.

Lieutenant Crosbie started to walk from the room.

"Of all the brass-eared, nipple-headed stupidity foisted on a long-suffering mankind," said Fuzzy Van Dyke, suddenly roaring into life, "you have undoubtedly made the greatest contribution! What do you do between murders? Inspect privies throughout greater White Plains?"

Crosbie turned and glanced back at Van Dyke. "Were you speaking to me?" he asked. There was a hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth, but he repressed it.

"I'll bet my old truss," said Van Dyke, glaring back at him, "that the only thing you ever did for a living, until tonight, was to steal pencils from the blind man and sell them to school children! You've been in this house for an hour and you still haven't had me look at the corpse to see if I know him!"

"You think you might?"

"How do I know?" howled Van Dyke. "For all I know now, the corpse might be a cross-eyed Zulu! But I've met—and am still meeting—more idiots than any man alive, so maybe I'll recognize him."

"Come on," Crosbie said curtly.

Van Dyke heaved himself up out of the chair and glared around the room.

"You," he said, stabbing a finger at Frank, "come with me! I don't care if your liver turns lavender at the sight of a corpse! Heaven knows you're stupid enough, but beside that blithering detective you shine like a star of brilliance! And I'll need somebody around with a glimmer of intelligence in case I say something in English!"

Lieutenant Crosbie started to object, then shrugged his shoulders and walked into the study, with Frank and Van Dyke following.

The body of Sax Britt was still slumped in the corner chair. A police photographer had his camera set up and was busy taking pictures at different angles. He had apparently almost finished as there were several film holders on the floor.

"Know him?" Crosbie asked.

Van Dyke squinted in the direction of the corpse. "How can I tell from here?" he asked evasively. "If that blundering vassal of yours gets out of the way, maybe I'll be able to say."

"Want to see if you can find a clue the police missed, don't you?" Crosbie said with a grin. He stepped over to the photographer and stooped to look through the ground glass of the camera. "You about through, Joe?" he asked.

"Yeah, just one more picture." Then, in a stage whisper that was evidently meant to be heard: "Who's the old buzzard?"

As Crosbie leaned over to look at the camera, Van Dyke had glanced quickly around, looking like a small boy about to invade the jam pantry, and then had quickly scooped up one of the film holders from the floor and thrust it beneath his coat. He straightened up and glared at the back of the photographer.

"Buzzard, eh?" he snorted, but it was obvious to Frank that his mind was on something else.

There was a flash of light as the photographer took another picture, then he gestured at Crosbie to indicate he was through and started dismantling his camera.

"Okay," Crosbie said, turning to Van Dyke, "take your look."

Van Dyke crossed the room and bent over, peering at the corpse. "Find anything in his pockets?" he asked casually.

"Nothing that helps any," Crosbie answered. "He's too old to have a draft card. There were a couple of letters addressed to him at the Gardner Hotel, but they were only bills. No other identification, or anything."

"Hmmm," said Van Dyke. He picked up the edge of Britt's coat and peered owlishly at a few faint marks of blue chalk.

"We saw those," Crosbie said. "Merely shows that the guy played pool or billiards some time. Or can you make some great deduction out of it?"

"Police academies," said Van Dyke, straightening up, "should try teaching their cops to have a little respect for their elders and betters!"

"Say, Lieutenant," said the photographer who was all packed except for his holders, "I think one of my holders is missing. I took twelve shots of the stiff and there's only five holders here. That's only ten shots."

"Maybe you left it in the camera."

"What do you think I am—the secretary of the local camera club?" the photographer asked scornfully.

"Well, there hasn't been anybody in here, except us," Crosbie said. He glanced at Van Dyke.

"I'll have none of your insinuations, you under-sexed bloodhound," exploded Van Dyke. "Don't look at me with your sly little ferret eyes! It's time you flatfeet learned you can't go around suspecting everybody for your own mistakes!"

"Okay," Crosbie said wearily. "You must have made a mistake, Joe. You still haven't said whether you recognize the corpse or not, Mr. Van Dyke."

"I don't know him. I thought he looked familiar, but discovered that he looks like you—only healthier," Van Dyke said gleefully, lumbering out of the room.

CHAPTER FIVE

The detective had finished his fingerprinting and was poring over the cards when Lieutenant Crosbie returned. He handed over two of the cards without saying anything. Crosbie looked at them, nodded and gave them back. He turned to face the room.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, "that all four of the servants were together in the kitchen and can alibi each other for the time when the murder was committed. Also that every door into the house, with the exception of the kitchen door which they could see, was and is locked on the inside. That pretty much spikes the outsider theory, even if I had contemplated it.

"Now, there are several things I want to clear up. Mr. Davall, you said you had made an appointment with this Britt before going in today. You made the appointment by phone?"

"Yes."

"Where did Britt live in New York?"

"At the Gardner Hotel on West Fifty-eighth Street. That is where I met him."

"You mentioned that Mr. Joyce was financing this experiment. Just what does that mean?"

"It means," Davall said, "that he is paying my expenses, such as Miss Walker's salary, and the expenses of the persons taking part in the experiment."

"They get no salary?"

"No. Under some circumstances, salaries might be paid. But everyone in this case volunteered so only their expenses are paid."

"The same was to be true of Britt?"

"Yes."

"I see. Now, when you took Britt into that room, you turned on the light for him?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"The floor lamp beside his chair," Davall said promptly.

"Later, you turned the light out for him?"

"No, he turned it out himself."

"But he was in the dark when you left?"

"Yes."

"Considering the nature of the weapon and the wound," Crosbie said, "I think it's safe to say that he wasn't killed in the dark; that the murderer must have turned the light on again before killing him. If there had been a light in the room when you were on the porch, would you have noticed it?"

"I'm sure I would," Davall said. "I never thought of that. It means that the murder must have been committed just before I stepped out on the porch."

"I imagine it was," Crosbie said. "You said that Britt worked in a self-imposed hypnotic state?"

"Yes."

"How deep would such a state be?"

"I can't say exactly," Davall said slowly. "I never saw him work, remember. I don't believe, however, that it could be very deep."

"Then in your judgment, snapping on a light which was turned directly into his face, would bring him out of it?"

"I couldn't say definitely," Davall answered, "but I think it would."

"How about the rest of you?" Crosbie asked.

"I quite agree with Mr. Davall," Sidney Wilson said. "The light should bring him out of it. Don't you think so, Mr. Langdon?"

"I do," Langdon said, nodding gravely.

"Fine," Crosbie said. "When you entered the room after the murder, Mr. Davall, you also turned on the light by his chair?"

"Mr. Bruce turned it on. I was just behind him."

Lieutenant Crosbie turned to Joyce. "You should be the most familiar with the house since it belongs to you," he said. "If you were going into the large study for something, which light would you be likely to turn on?"

"The one by the chair," Joyce answered after a moment of thought.

"In other words, the same one that Bruce turned on?"

"Yes."

"I noticed," Crosbie said, "that that lamp is so placed that in order to turn it on or off, if you weren't sitting in the chair, you'd have to lean on the small table in front of it to reach the switch. Since it is more difficult to turn on than any of the others, why would you turn that particular one on?"

"I don't know exactly," Joyce said slowly. "I never thought of it before. I guess for one thing that it is on a direct line from the inside door and is right beside the porch door. Usually there is enough reflected light from other parts of the house to show you the position of that lamp too."

"Would you say the same, Mr. Davall?" Crosbie asked.

Davall nodded.

"That's the way I figured it," Crosbie said with satisfaction. "Now, if turning the light on, as the murderer must have, would bring Britt out of his trance, the person who did so must have been someone he recognized and whom he was not surprised to see. If it had been someone who knew him earlier, he would have been surprised and probably on his guard. Yet it is obvious that he wasn't on guard. So he knew the murderer, expected no danger from him, and was not surprised to have him walk into the study in the middle of the experiment."

"Very sound reasoning," Sidney Wilson remarked.

"Do you agree, Mr. Van Dyke?" Crosbie asked.

"Young man," Van Dyke said, glaring, "Out with it! Out with it! You have the expression of a Pekinese that just gulped the dinner steak. Out with it!"

"Well," Crosbie said, "there is only one person here who will fit in with the above reasoning. I admit that I don't know the motive and I will also admit frankly that I don't have enough evidence to make an arrest. But the one person who will fit these requirements is —Robert Davall."

The silence that followed was oppressive. Renee Lee was the first to break it.

"Oh, I'm sure you're wrong," she said. "Mr. Davall is much too nice a man to be a murderer."

As though she had released their tongues, the others took up the protest but there was doubt in their voices at the same time.

Davall himself hadn't moved or spoken, as though he had seen what was coming. The only other one who hadn't spoken was Chariman Van Dyke. But now he did.

"God protect me from agricultural detectives," he said. "Of all the stupid, idiotic dim-wits spawned by the moronic human race, you are undoubtedly the ultimate! It's a disgrace to humanity that they didn't hang you the first time they caught you swinging the cat by it's tail, instead of merely prophesying, quite accurately, that you would one day go insane! Bah!"

"How you talk," Crosbie said. "You have nothing to say, Mr. Davall?"

"You pulled the rabbit from the hat," Davall said calmly, "so I'd rather you finish the trick."

"Okay," Crosbie said. "I told you I don't have enough evidence to make an arrest, so we'll let it ride this way until I do. All I need now is the motive. I won't bother you people any more tonight, but I wouldn't advise any of you to leave. A few of my men will be outside to protect anyone who feels like walking in his sleep. I'll see you in the morning. Good night, all."

"And God bless Tiny Tim," Van Dyke muttered savagely as Lieutenant Crosbie and his men closed the door behind them.

CHAPTER SIX

It was daylight.

Frank Bruce wrestled with sleep. He buried his face in the pillow. Somewhere he heard a rooster crow and for a moment thought he might have gone to sleep in the movies and now the Pathe newsreel was on. He tried telling himself that he was getting sleepier. He tried repeating the first line of his play over and over in hopes it would lull him back to sleep . He tried counting. He relaxed and told himself firmly that he was asleep.

It did no good. Something had awakened him and there was no use trying to deny the fact any longer.

He rolled over on his back but as a last measure of resistance, he refused to open his eyes and expose them to the merciless light of morning.

The early morning was especially reserved for milkmen and such, he told himself firmly, and eventually sleep would return to him. All he had to do was wait patiently.

Then he heard a noise which he recognized as that which had awakened him in the first place. It was a steady, thumping noise that refused to be ignored. He opened one eye to see what was causing it.

He groaned.

"Go away," he said. "I appreciate your great charm. In fact, I've grown very fond of you in this short time. I love you like a father; like a brother. But I see no reason why every time I wake up I should see you. It's too much to ask of a man."

"Wake up, you infernal puppy," Chariman Van Dyke said. "Don't think that I find any pleasure in gazing upon your barnacle face. When you snore your face takes on the expression of a sea serpent in the middle of a censorable dream."

Frank opened both eyes and groaned again. Not only was Chariman Van Dyke standing in his room, but it was Van Dyke in all his pristine glory. He wore a sport coat that evaded description. It was brighter even than the one of the night before. Lurid was the only word for it.

"Go away," Frank said again. "I don't care if you pan every play I ever write. That coat makes you look like a pregnant rainbow."

"Don't try to woo me with your flattery," retorted Van Dyke. "You ought to be glad I came up to wake you, instead of letting that girl of yours see your worst aspects."

"Kalli?" Frank said, sitting up in bed. "You mean Kalli is coming up to my room?"

"Were you expecting someone else?"

"Why the hell didn't you say so?" Frank asked, jumping out of bed. He threw off his pajamas and began dressing quickly.

"Why is she coming up here?" he asked.

"She is bringing your breakfast."

Halfway to the bathroom, with his toothbrush in his hand, Frank stopped.

"Wait a minute," he said. "What the hell is going on? It can't be any more than eight-thirty."

"Eight-five to be exact."

"That's practically the middle of the night. And first you come barging in here, dressed like a refugee from Hollywood Boulevard, and now Kalli is bringing my breakfast. That isn't the way to welcome a week-end guest, murder or no murder. What's the idea?"

"The idea," Van Dyke said complacently, "is for you to brush your teeth like a goddam little gentleman and gulp down your breakfast in a hurry when she brings it. On your way, termite."

Frank brushed his teeth and washed in record time. But Kalli still had not arrived when he returned.

"Look, Mr. Van Dyke—" he began.

"Call me Fuzzy," Van Dyke said. "Otherwise you'll be breaking down and calling me Boo-Boo or Dogface and I refuse to accept your company on such familiar terms."

"I still want to know what's back of all this," Frank said.

"You are being given the invaluable opportunity of spending a day with the only literate man in the Twentieth Century. What more can you ask of life? You can tell your grandchildren about it—if there's any fertility in you, which I doubt."

"You still haven't answered my question. There's a literary critic in the woodpile somewhere. Out with it."

"You may recall that we had a murder last night," Van Dyke said. "That half-baked village constable stopped herding cows long enough to come here and accuse Davall of committing it. You and I are going to prove that that detective is directly descended from the Jukes family."

"I thought you said you didn't like Davall?"

"I don't," snorted Van Dyke, "but I refuse to let such colossal stupidity blush unseen."

"'And where is your nose?' quoth Sancho, seeing him not without disguise," Frank said, laughing. "What particular windmill are you going to charge first?"

"Insufferable youth!" Van Dyke said as the door opened, letting in Kalli.

She wore rust-colored slacks that matched her hair. She looked fresher than anyone had a right to look at that time of day. She carried a tray with a plate of bacon and eggs and two cups of coffee.

"Good morning, darling," she said cheerfully. "Was he grumpy when he woke up, Fuzzy?"

"Unendurable! Young woman, you are resigning yourself to a life of catering to his whims and bearing innumerable sniveling brats."

Kalli laughed and the sound of her infectious laughter swept away any horror that might have been left over from the night before.

"Eat your breakfast before it gets cold," she said. "I brought another cup of coffee for you, Fuzzy."

"You are the only light in an old man's life," Van Dyke said, spooning vast quantities of sugar into his cup. "I don't know why you choose to saddle yourself with this ink-stained wretch. He is probably a secret collector of old G-strings from deceased burlesque queens."

"Happiness hangs by a G-string," Frank sang in a monotone.

"You see," Van Dyke said triumphantly.

"Frank was in a grumpy mood last night, but I knew you'd like him when you got to know him," Kalli said.

"Like him? I detest him!"

"Did you wake me up at eight o'clock in the morning to discuss my cardinal points of attraction?" Frank demanded. "By the way, if you're going to do any detecting, you'd better get out of that Broadway bush coat."

"He's dying with envy," Van Dyke said.

"Incidentally," Frank said, "if you came up last night for only an hour or two, how come you had a change of clothes with you?"

"I was going to catch a train for Connecticut when I left here. Would you like to carry on this charming chit-chat, or can we get down to business?"

"Lead on, Mycroft," Frank said, turning his attention to the eggs.

"While your chatterbox eats his way to the grave," Van Dyke said, turning to Kalli, "you and I will indulge in a little light gossip. I'm interested in those four people who volunteered to help Davall. How were they selected?"

"Well," said Kalli, perching on the side of Frank's chair, "there was a lot of advance publicity about Martin Joyce backing Davall's experiments so, when they were ready, Davall advertised for volunteers. A lot of people answered and he narrowed them down to these four."

"He took Mr. Langdon and Mr. Wilson because they were practically the only ones who knew anything about telepathy. Mr. Langdon had such an impressive background of telepathy that there was never any doubt of choosing him. And he has more than lived up to it. If he continues at the rate he has been going since we started, he will probably turn out to be the best percipient ever discovered. Which is very lucky for Davall."

"Why?" demanded Van Dyke. "Is that super-annuated magician going to turn into a telepathy fiend? I suppose he's tired of working and wants an easy snap the rest of his life. Joyce will set up a telepathy foundation, which will help him sell more of his bump-reading machines, and Davall will be the head of it, eh?"

"Not quite," Kalli laughed. "Mr. Joyce is going to establish a telepathy foundation, but Davall won't have anything to do with it. He's going to get a book out of it and a vaudeville tour afterward. Having a successful percipient like Langdon will give Davall more publicity for those two things. There's just one trouble . . ."

"What's that?"

"With the exception of Helen Peterson and Renee Lee, everyone is publicity shy. Davall was very sore when this thing started. You know, Joyce is practically a second J. P. Morgan when it comes to having pictures taken. He froths at the mouth if a photographer so much as aims a camera at him. It turned out that Langdon and Wilson both feel the same way. It's obvious that they are both sincerely interested in the work they're doing and they probably feel that publicity cheapens it. So they refused to pose for pictures and Davall is almost out of his mind."

"That's the trouble with magicians," grumbled Van Dyke. "Davall would murder his old grandmother with a meat cleaver if he thought he'd get a good press out of it."

"That reminds me," Frank said through a mouthful of eggs, "what was the idea of stealing a plate from that police photographer last night? Don't tell me you're a kleptomaniac in your lighter moments?"

"Silence, urchin. I collect photographs of old corpses so I can sit around in my room and gloat over them. Now, Kalli, tell me more about those four. Langdon's good, eh?"

"I'll say. He offered plenty of proof of it when he applied. He's worked in telepathy groups all over the world. He brought letters from the Royal Psychic Research group in England, showing that he had worked with them for over five years. He has quite a distinguished background."

"And the little pipsqueak, Wilson?"

"Almost as good a background, although not as well authenticated. And he's not as much a pipsqueak as he appears. I told you that he too has a horror of having his picture taken. One day a photographer snapped a shot of him before Wilson could turn away. He almost killed the poor photographer, getting the plate away from him."

"And the two girls?" Van Dyke asked.

"Miss Peterson was chosen because she represented a type that Davall wanted. She comes from a good family and has a good cultural background. Socially and intellectually she is a snob. She may have imagination but it has never been developed. Davall wanted to see the results of such a mind in the experiments. Although it has nothing to do with it, she also has the morals of an alley cat and has the gambling fever so bad she can't stop."

"Any idea why she volunteered?"

"Probably because she was bored. She came out three or four years ago and since then has done about everything that debutantes do—except get married. So it was probably complete boredom. I doubt if she had any other reason, although it is possible that she has decided to take up telepathy as a fad. She is probably the type for that. Or, again, maybe she did it to make a play for Joyce. Her gambling must keep her pretty well drained financially."

"And Renee Lee?" Van Dyke wanted to know.

"I think she volunteered for a different reason," Kalli said thoughtfully. "She's a chorus girl, you know, but hasn't been in a show for about six months. If she knew about the experiment at all, she had to know that it was going to be held here and that Martin Joyce was backing it. I think she volunteered with the idea of making a play for Joyce. In addition to his reputation as a wolf, he also is known to be very generous when he gets tired of a woman."

"So what happened?" demanded Van Dyke. "They didn't appear so cuddly last night and Martin Joyce certainly never turned down anything that resembled in the slightest the female of the species."

"Helen Peterson beat her to the punch," Kalli said. "I don't think she's really interested in Joyce—although you never can tell—but she saw Renee starting to make a play, so she stepped in. Martin Joyce has had his share of chorus girls but I expect his diet of debs has been meager, so he hasn't looked at anybody but Park Avenue's darling since then."

"And the outcome?" demanded Van Dyke.

"I couldn't swear to it, but I think they've been having an affair. I saw Joyce pussy-footing down the hall towards her room a couple of nights."

"The man with the elastic libido!" Van Dyke said.

"Why don't you go find a love life of your own?" asked Frank, "instead of trying to enjoy everyone else's?"

"Silence, urchin. Addle your pigeon brains with coffee and don't question the actions of your betters. How did Miss Renee Lee react to those results?"

"She struggled against it at first, then gave up after a day or two. She tried her hand at Davall but the nearest he came to responding was to show her card tricks. That's about as passionate as Davall ever gets with anyone. Then, in desperation, she even tried to get a rise out of Wilson and Langdon but they wouldn't talk about anything but extra-sensory perception. Since then she's resigned herself to boredom."

"What's your opinion of the two girls?" Van Dyke asked.

"I like Renee the best," Kalli said promptly. "Morally she may be a little loose, but basically she's a swell person. Helen Peterson, on the other hand, is cool and calculating. And she's pretty much on the bitchy side."

Chariman Van Dyke nodded, scowling over his glasses at the wall.

"No other romances, no other feuds?" he asked.

"No," Kalli said. "Ordinarily you'd expect a lot of rivalry between Wilson and Langdon since they don't agree on every point, but there isn't. They are perfectly happy to argue with each other all day."

"So now that you have all the dirt," Frank said, "what do we do? Peer around corners and eavesdrop at doors?"

"We do not," Van Dyke said. "Martin Joyce gave me permission to use one of his cars. I told him I had an urgent trip to make. So you are going to drive me into New York where we hope to harvest information."

"How do you know that Davall didn't do it?" Frank asked.

Van Dyke gave him a look of scorn. "The only way to make a magician lose his temper is to suggest that you saw Thurston or Houdini do a trick better than he does it. Can you imagine a man like that committing murder?"

"So what makes you think you can clear him? Did you ever solve a murder?"

"Must I always be saddled with morons!" exclaimed Van Dyke, rolling his eyes towards the ceiling. "I am familiar with a thousand murder cases, Barnacle Face, and I know more about crime methods than any policeman could hope to learn. By a process of elimination we can arrive at why the murder was committed, then, by a little careful acquisition of information and putting things together, we arrive at the murderer."

"All right, I'll bite. Why was the murder committed?"

Chariman Van Dyke folded his hands comfortably across his stomach and stared over his glasses at Frank.

"There are generally seven reasons why murder is committed," he said. "There is an eighth one, which fits cases such as that of Wainewright who killed his sister-in-law because she had thick ankles, but I think we can ignore it. Now the seven reasons are:

"One: Murder for gain.

"Two: Murder for revenge.

"Three: Murder for elimination.

"Four: Murder for jealousy.

"Five: Murder for lust.

"Six: Murder for ambition.

"Seven: Murder stemming from sexual perversion.

"How many of those do you think fits the murder of Sax Britt?"

"Almost all or any of them," Frank said.

"How fortunate for you that brains are not essential to a playwright," grumbled Van Dyke. "I'll grant you that there are probably no normal people in this house, but you can safely say that sexual perversion was not at the root of this crime. And if you try to give a Freudian interpretation to the scissors in the eye, I'll strangle you with your own pajamas."

"I'll grant that you're probably right on that," Frank said.

"Probably right?" snorted Van Dyke. "I'm always right. We can also eliminate murder for ambition. Britt occupied no position that anyone would envy enough to kill him. There are no hungry successors around."

"Granted," Frank said.

"The same can be said for murder for gain. On the surface, at least, he had nothing for anyone to covet. From his clothes, one would say that he was neither a wealthy man nor a poor one. Since the locked doors more or less force us to deal with the inhabitants of the house, it's fairly safe to discount such attractions as inherited monies or insurance policies."

"Granted."

"We can eliminate lust, I believe. While he was not completely repulsive, neither did he seem the type who might be the object of such great lust that he would be killed to achieve its end."

"Also granted."

"Almost the same reasons can be applied to jealousy. It is possible that he might have been killed because of jealousy but extremely improbable. Especially under the existing circumstances."

"I will agree to that also," Frank said.

"Generous of you," Van Dyke retorted. "That leaves only two reasons, either of which might fit. Revenge and elimination. Both indicate a past acquaintance with someone in the house. I'll come back to that in a moment. But first we'll consider revenge. I'm inclined to throw that out too, even though it is conceivable. It seems unlikely that anyone hating Britt enough to kill him for revenge would have waited for such circumstances to commit the murder. Revenge would have caused the murderer to hunt Britt out instead of waiting for him to come to the slaughter. Also, since Britt was told before coming who was here, it seems unlikely he would have come knowing that one of these people had reason to kill him. That sound reasonable to you?"

"Yes," agreed Frank.

"That leaves us elimination, which also indicates previous contact with someone in the house. Now everyone claims that they never saw him or heard of him before. If we accept the reason of elimination, it means someone is lying. That someone is obviously the murderer, but why lie about it?"

"Because if they said they knew him, it would point to them as the murderer," Kalli suggested.

"Not necessarily," Van Dyke said. "If someone in the house had previously been associated with Britt, it would certainly be discovered in an investigation—if the association was an ordinary one. Therefore, it would be wiser to tell about it immediately since it wouldn't put the police any nearer to proof. That would have been the intelligent thing to do. And you can be sure that this was not a stupid murder. Granting the murderer intelligence of a sort, now why did he lie about knowing Britt?"

"He must be confident that the association won't be discovered," Frank said.

"I think that's it. The only type of association which would be so hidden would be an illegal one. Not only is that a result of logical reasoning as to why someone is lying about knowing Britt, but it dovetails with elimination as the reason for the killing. I should say there are only two reasons why someone would want Britt eliminated—considering the people we're dealing with. One: Britt wanted to blackmail this person because of the past. With this, it would follow that he had sometime previously declared his intentions, so that he was killed before he could make his demands. Two: our mysterious someone has a game which he is playing here and knew that Britt would recognize him and probably spoil the game."

"Say, that's really good going, Fuzzy," Frank said with enthusiasm. "You've gotten it down to a working point at least. It would follow, in either of the two cases you've narrowed it to, that Britt was a phony. That is, he wasn't an expert in telepathy and was only using that as an excuse to get into the house. Therefore, he must have been some kind of crook."

"So you finally acknowledge the quality of a superior mind," Van Dyke said.

"Incidentally, Kalli," Frank said with a grin, "did you notice that he talked almost five minutes without once being insulting?"

"You are an impertinent puppy," Van Dyke growled, "and I predict you'll die in a brothel brawl. But at least when it's explained to you in simple terms you can see a point. Now you know why we are driving to New York. We'll see if we can find out something about Sax Britt."

"We'd better leave pretty soon," Frank said. "Lieutenant Crosbie will be showing up to stop your little games."

"As soon as you recover from your amazement at being confronted by an intelligence, I'm ready," Van Dyke said.

"Let's go then. Run on back downstairs and hold the fort, Kalli."

"You will be careful, won't you, darling?" she asked. She turned her face up to be kissed.

"Will you two stop drooling in contemplation of your future sex life?" Van Dyke growled. "We are about to save a man's life and you stop to slobber on each other's chins!"

"You're only jealous, Fuzzy," Kalli said, laughing. She started for the door, but stopped beside him. She kissed him quickly on the cheek and ran out.

"Slattern!" Van Dyke bellowed after her. "Come on, Lothario." He heaved himself out of the chair. Frank followed him downstairs and out to the garage.

There were three cars parked there. Two Packards and a Chrysler convertible.

"Joyce gave me the keys to the Chrysler," Van Dyke said, handing them over. "Now deliver me to New York. It will be good training for you when you finally learn you can't make money from plays and have to work for a living to support your wife and ten children." He clambered into the car.

Frank threw open the garage doors and got in behind the wheel. He backed the Chrysler out and swung into the drive that curved past the front of the house to the highway.

As they drove past the house, Frank caught a glimpse of a face looking out at them. It was a pale face, with a strained look around the eyes. There was fear in the face as the eyes followed the progress of the car. It was the first time Frank had seen a definite emotion in its expression.

It was Helen Peterson.

"The ghosts must have been walking last night," Van Dyke said, indicating that he had seen her too. "Or the murder interfered with her love life."

A plainclothesman stepped out in front of the car at the exit from the grounds. Faced with the choice of stopping or running over him, Frank stopped.

"Sorry," the man said, "but Lieutenant Crosbie said no one was to leave the grounds before he returned this morning."

"Do you mean," bellowed Chariman Van Dyke as though the man were deaf, "that I personally am under arrest?"

"Not under arrest, sir," the detective said. "You're just to stay on the grounds."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir. But, whoever you are, the orders were for everyone to stay on the grounds."

"I am Chariman Van Dyke and you'll either have to arrest me and put handcuffs on me or let me leave!"

"I haven't any orders to arrest you, but I can't let you leave either," the man repeated stubbornly.

"Bah!" Van Dyke retorted. "Go back to whatever secret vice you were practicing in those bushes and stop trying to act like a policeman! Drive on, Frank, drive on!"

Moved by the sheer force of his words, Frank let the clutch out and the car shot out into the road. There was a hoarse shout behind them and Frank expected any minute to see a bullet hole appear in the windshield if not in him. But there was no shot. Just that one shout.

Chariman Van Dyke chuckled happily as Frank swung the car onto the White Plains Post Road and stepped on the gas.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The first few miles, on the way into New York, were silent ones. Frank concentrated on his driving while Fuzzy Van Dyke sat, glaring out the window.

"Where do you want to go?" Frank asked, breaking the silence.

"Fifty-eighth Street," grunted Fuzzy.

"Near the Gardner Hotel, eh? What do you expect to learn that the cops won't find out?"

"Nothing," said Fuzzy, "but I expect to learn it sooner."

"But the police have probably already been in touch with the hotel."

"I'm not going to the hotel, Clabber Face. If you'll work that infected spot you call your brain, you'll remember that I noticed the markings of pool chalk on the coat of the corpse last night. We're going to a poolroom. That's why I borrowed the negatives from that photographer."

"You'll have to get a print made before you can get any identification."

"I've got one," Fuzzy retorted. "I don't spend all my time in bed dreaming, like some people I could name. While you were snoring in bed last night, I was in Joyce's dark room turning out a print."

"All things to all men, aren't you?" Frank said, grinning.

"Things have come to a pretty pass when the whole world is astonished at meeting a literate man!"

"What makes you think you'll pick up anything that'll help solve the murder?"

"Somebody," said Fuzzy, scowling ferociously at a driver who dared to blow his horn at them, "killed Sax Britt because he in some way connected up with their past. Now, Sax Britt, my floundering fledgling, was no mere mortal. I'll bet my great-grandmother's G-string that he learned all he knew about telepathy out of a book three or four days before he got in touch with Davall."

"What makes you think so?"

"He had all the earmarks of a first-class confidence man. And that also fits in with my theory of why Britt was killed. He talked his way into the telepathy scheme in order to work some sort of confidence game or blackmail."

"So you're just going to start walking around asking poolroom owners if they know this guy! That should be easy! There must not be more than a hundred thousand poolrooms in New York!"

"Don't pull any of your cheap sarcasm on me," retorted Fuzzy. "Save it for your nasty little plays! We're going to a poolroom run by a man named Whitey Gibbs. If you could read, and ever got around to reading good books, you'd know that I once wrote a book about the adventures of a retired confidence man, named Whitey Gibbs. If I'm right about Sax Britt, Whitey will recognize his picture."

"You've written a lot of stuff on crime," Frank said. "What's your favorite murder case?"

"Did you ever hear of the Boughton case?"

Frank shook his head.

"It was a warm summer in the year 1780 when the quiet hamlet of Little Lawford in Warwickshire, about three miles from Rugby, was shocked by word that Sir Theodosius Boughton was caught in the throes of a grim struggle with death. He—"

"You could spare me the radio voice," Frank said dryly.

"Uncouth urchin!" Van Dyke snapped. "Just for that, you won't hear the story at all. And I hope you'll live to regret it!"

"I doubt it." Frank grinned. "When you suddenly decided to go Sherlocking all over the place today, why did you pick on me to play Watson?"

"Because the likelihood of your being guilty was small and because, while you're just as moronic as the others, at least you're younger and not so set in your ways. Don't bother me. If you want to know all the details, listen to my broadcast tonight."

"You're doing a broadcast tonight?"

"I broadcast every Saturday night, fifty weeks in each year, and if you devoted less time to your libido, you'd know it."

"You have to come back into town tonight?" Frank asked.

"No. The network can damn well set up a microphone in Joyce's house for me. It's easier to move a microphone around than to move me."

"What makes you so sure that you'll have all the details by the time you broadcast?"

"Because," roared Fuzzy, "I can accomplish anything once I set my mind to it and I've got to do something before that lard-headed detective arrests half the population of New York state. Now, shut up and see if you can pilot this crate over to Madison Avenue without running over any widows or orphans on the way. The place is Whitey's Billiard Parlor."

The remainder of the ride was completed in silence. Frank swung the car onto Madison Avenue and nosed it to the curb. There was a car in front of the billiard hall and Frank parked right behind it.

"It's a conspiracy," growled Van Dyke as Frank cut off the ignition, "that's what it is! Everybody conspires to make me walk!"

"That little distance won't hurt you," Frank said dryly.

Fuzzy Van Dyke snorted scornfully and heaved his bulk out of the car. He charged across the sidewalk like a circus tent under full sail. Frank pocketed the car key and hurried after him.

Four young fellows were knocking the balls around on one of the pool tables while another youth stood watching them. A small, slender man, with a wizened, sharp face, stood back of a short counter. He glanced at Van Dyke and Frank as they entered and there was a flicker of recognition in his eyes as they rested on Van Dyke. But other than that, his expression did not change.

"This is Frank Bruce," said Fuzzy, trying to beam but only succeeding in looking cherubic in an overgrown way. "He's a friend of mine. Frank, this is Whitey Gibbs."

The man behind the counter nodded at Frank and turned his oblique glance back to Fuzzy.

"Wanted to see you a minute," Fuzzy said. "How about the back room?"

Whitey Gibbs raised his voice without looking around.

"Georgie," he said, "watch the front for a minute . . . Come on in the back, Fuzzy."

He led the way back past the pool tables to a private room. It looked like—and probably was—a poker room.

"What's up, Fuzzy?" Whitey Gibbs asked.

"Nothing important," answered Fuzzy with a leer that was probably meant to be a smile. "I thought maybe we might talk about doing a few more articles on you."

"That's fine," said Whitey, seating himself on the edge of one of the tables. "Now, what did you *really* want from me?"

"That's gratitude for you," howled Fuzzy. "I come here to let this insolent pup bask in the warmth of my personality and he suspects I want something!"

"You do, don't you?" asked Whitey with a thin-lipped smile.

Fuzzy drew a deep breath. "Yes," he admitted calmly.

Whitey grinned at Frank. "I knew it," he said. "I knew you didn't want to come back in the private room to talk about writing an article. What do you want?"

"Do you know this man?" Fuzzy asked, whipping a picture from beneath his coat. It was a print of the negative he'd stolen the night before from the police photographer. "He called himself Sax Britt," he added.

"*Called* himself?" asked Whitey, taking the print.

"Yes. He's dead now. Somebody murdered him."

Whitey Gibbs nodded and handed the picture back.

"Not surprising," he said. "His name was Sim Bailey, but sometimes he called himself S. L. Boland, Bernard J. Somers, or Sax Britt, depending on where he was."

"Then I was right in guessing that he was a confidence man," Fuzzy said triumphantly. "But why did you say you were not surprised that somebody murdered him?"

Whitey lit a cigarette and leaned back on the table. He took several slow puffs on the cigarette before answering.

"Sim Bailey," he finally said, "or Sax Britt, as you called him, was what you might call a member in bad standing of the big con for years. That is, he worked big con games but he was never considered one of the boys. He wasn't above takin' them with a little blackmail. His trick was to wait until someone had a con game under way and then step in for a cut, by threatening to spill the whole thing to the mark. Occasionally when he couldn't find a con game to cut/in on, he'd work on his own, mostly the race track game."

"Did he work alone or with someone else?" Fuzzy asked.

"Mostly alone, but he teamed up once in a while when he could find someone to work with. Otherwise, he picked his shills up from the street and they never knew they were shilling for him. Incidentally, the cops were around the other day, asking me about Sim."

"Why?"

"They've been getting rumbles about one of the con men working the big gambling clubs with a blonde society dame. They thought it might be Sim. I didn't tell them anything, one way or the other, but it wasn't Sim. It was probably Deacon Long. I heard that he was working with some girl."

"How long since you've seen this Sim Bailey?"

"About a week ago," Whitey Gibbs said. "He was in here and borrowed a century note from me. Said he had a job lined up but didn't say what it was."

"You were friendly enough with him to loan him money?" Fuzzy asked.

"Not exactly. But Sim could be a tough customer. He could do me a lot of damage if he wanted to, so I never refused him a loan. And I never expected to get the loans back. Got any idea who killed him?"

"The police have," Fuzzy grunted, "but I've got different ideas. They think it was a friend of mine and I'm going to prove that in this case the well-known blunt instrument is their brains!"

"So Sim finally got paid off," Whitey said. "I guess maybe there'll be a lot of guys celebrate when they hear that."

"How'd he get started?" Van Dyke asked idly.

"Selling stock. Him and another fellow sold phony mining stock for a year and cleaned up plenty—only the other fellow did most of the cleaning up, according to Sim. About ten years ago the Feds almost put them out of business and the two of them split up. It wasn't until later that Sim found out that he'd been getting the short end of the collections. When they split up, Sim started working the straight con and the other fellow started a new racket. Sim was always talking about going around and making a collection from this guy Joyce, but I guess he won't now."

"Did you say Joyce?" Fuzzy asked.

"Sure. That was the other fellow that was in the mining stock with Sim. Martin Joyce. He's a big millionaire now, although he's still working a confidence game."

Fuzzy Van Dyke whistled softly.

The mention of Joyce's name had taken both Van Dyke and Frank by surprise. It was true that neither of them particularly liked Joyce, but they had never once thought of him in connection with the murder. They wouldn't have been surprised if Joyce had been murdered. They wouldn't have been surprised to hear of him being mixed up in anything that concerned women. But, except for his philandering, they had never thought of him in the role of villain.

He was too fat to be a villain. There was no "lean and hungry" look about him.

"Are you sure about that?" Van Dyke asked.

"I heard Sim talk about it enough," Whitey said. "They called themselves the Securities Commission and advertised all over in local newspapers. They bought up a lot of old useless mines and salted them. When the marks had to be softened up, Sim gave them the sales talk. He always was a good talker. This Joyce ran the office and helped himself to most of the dough. Sim didn't get wise until it was all over, like I told you. But that was the reason he was always going around to collect."

"You mean," Frank said, speaking for the first time, "that Joyce made all of his money in phony gold stock?"

"Not all of it," Whitey said. "He's made a lot of it since then in his new racket."

"You mean the bumps on the head?" Fuzzy asked.

"Yeah, but there's more to it than that machine he sells. He's got a monopoly on making the bump charts for all the guys that work carnies and fairs. What it amounts to is that the guys all have to give him a part of their take. Having a monopoly, he just upped the prices that they had to pay until he was getting a good cut. A couple of times, some of the boys pooled their dough and set up printing plants to run off the charts, but something always happened to the plants shortly after they opened."

"The old protection racket, eh?" said Fuzzy.

"Sure, only smoother. Can you imagine the amount of dough he's pulling in with all the bump readers in the country paying him a share of their take?"

"And about a week before Sim Bailey shows up at Joyce's place as Sax Britt, he was talking about a new prospect," muttered Fuzzy. "Do you know if Joyce was the prospect he had in mind?"

Whitey shook his head. "It might have been, but he didn't say. Sim never did talk much . . . Say, it was at this Joyce's house that Sim got bumped off, eh?"

"Within a few minutes after he arrived," Fuzzy said.

"Like that, huh," Whitey said. "Looks like maybe Sim run up against somebody that was tougher'n he was."

"Maybe," grunted Van Dyke.

"What do you mean maybe?" demanded Frank. "That fits in with the analysis that you made earlier."

"Naturally," Van Dyke said, in a tone of voice that took credit for the fact, "but I'd still like to investigate certain other people. I'm still curious about why Helen Peterson had nothing but one little doodle on her paper after that telepathy session."

"Peterson?" Whitey asked, as though trying to remember something. "Peterson . . . I got it now!"

"You mean you know her too?" Frank asked.

"I don't know her but maybe I've seen her. Tall, sort of white-faced babe with black hair? Got a snooty look about her?"

"Could be her," Van Dyke said. "Where'd you see her?"

"Out front. It was one night last week, I think. Some of the boys was in here. Let's see . . . There was The Green Kid, One-Card Charlie and Long-Handled Harry . . ."

"Long-Handled Harry?" asked Frank, intrigued by the name.

"Yeah. Harry Lekonvitch. His name was too much to remember so the boys called him Long-Handled Harry."

"Peterson!" prodded Van Dyke.

"I'm coming to her," Whitey said. "A car pulled up out front and Deacon Long came in. Deacon is one of the best of the big con. This babe was with him but she stayed out in the car. I noticed her and kidded Deacon about it. I remember he told me her name was Peterson and something about her being uptown stuff. Nothing more was said about it and Deacon left right away."

"All those men you mentioned are confidence men?" Van Dyke asked.

"Sure. Whenever they're in town, they drop in to see me. I know most of them."

"Well, I guess you can't give us any more help," Van Dyke said. "Come on, Frank." He lumbered towards the door.

"Don't mind him," Frank said to Whitey. "He's just naturally ill-mannered. But thanks for helping us."

"I am not!" growled Van Dyke from the door. "He knows I'm appreciative. If I weren't, I'd have spit in his eye."

"I've met his kind before," Whitey said to Frank, with a friendly grin.

"God! Don't tell me there are more like Fuzzy!" Frank said fervently as he went through the door.

"Ingrate!" Van Dyke flung over his shoulder without stopping or looking back.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Drive up to the Public Library on Forty-Second Street," Van Dyke said when Frank caught up with him at the car. "And don't chatter like a woman. I want to think."

Frank had a dozen things he wanted to ask Van Dyke but he still hadn't had the chance when they had parked a block away from the library. Van Dyke told him to go into the newspaper room and look up the paper that had the story of the extra-sensory perception tests to be held at Joyce's home and see how much the story told about Joyce. As Frank turned into the newspaper section, he saw Van Dyke squeezing himself into one of the phone booths.

He had no trouble finding the story and he copied down the high points of it on the back of an envelope in his pocket. Then he went out into the hall to wait for Van Dyke.

"When a man reaches my age," grumbled Van Dyke when he arrived an hour later, "there ought to be a law against him doing anything more strenuous than feeding himself. Let's get some lunch."

Frank tried to start the conversation several times while they were having lunch in Sardi's, but each time Van Dyke stopped him.

"All right," Van Dyke growled, when they were finally driving north on Fifth Avenue. "I can see the question marks crawling around in your brain like maggots. Fire away."

"What were you doing in the library?"

"Reading," Van Dyke said promptly. "You ought to try it some time."

"And the telephone call?"

"So you were spying on me! Well, Mr. Nosey Parker, I had to call the broadcasting company to tell them to set a microphone up in Joyce's house tonight, didn't I?"

"What about Helen Peterson?"

"Well, what about her? You can't convict her because she was seen with a confidence man. She doesn't object to Joyce lollygagging around her so she can't be so particular."

"Don't you want to know what the newspaper article said about Joyce?"

"I know," Van Dyke answered, leaning back in the seat.

"You looked it up too?"

"No."

"All right," said Frank. "If you're so smart, let's hear what it said."

"It said something to the effect that Mr. Martin Joyce, that well-known millionaire and Broadway angel, had lately become interested in extra-sensory perception and would finance a series of tests conducted by Robert Davall. If you read the tabloids, they probably mentioned that Mr. Joyce is the manufacturer of a machine known as the Telepathology Meter. And all of the papers commented on the fact that Mr. Joyce is camera shy and mentioned that in this respect he was similar to the late J. P. Morgan. The *Mirror* and *News* probably carried pictures of Joyce's back as he ducked a photographer."

"That's close enough," admitted Frank. "If you knew what was going to be in the news stories, why make me go to all that trouble?"

"Because I was only guessing and I wanted it confirmed. You'll notice that by visiting Whitey we at least learned why Martin Joyce is so camera shy."

"Why?"

"Both his past and his present. He's rooking the suckers who buy that phrenology machine of his and he's giving a royal rooking to the fakes who are, in turn, rooking the suckers reading their bumps. Naturally, he'd feel safer if too many of those people don't know what he looks like."

"Can't blame him," Frank said. "The part about Peterson was interesting too, even if you do brush it off. But do you mean that you don't attach any significance to a debutante going out with a confidence man? Or maybe she isn't a debutante . . ."

"Some of them go out with far worse than confidence men," growled Fuzzy. "We already know that she's a sucker for gambling and he might be taking her in to some of the gambling houses. And she is a debutante, or was three years ago. She comes from a good, but impoverished, family. Now, if you've quite finished with your petty questions, I'd like to hear what you think about the murder of Sax Britt. Or has that pulpy portion of your head, classified as your brain, been dormant all day?"

Frank waited for a traffic light to change. Then, as he stepped on the accelerator, he answered.

"Right this minute," he said, "I'm confused. I was toddling along on a nice little theory, in the best tradition of the mystery novels I have to read every week, then along come two facts that upset my fine deducting. First, we find a definite tie-up between Joyce and Britt. The fact that Joyce at first glance thought Britt looked familiar and then when he had a chance to confirm that impression, lied and said he didn't know him, makes this look more sinister. Then we find out that the fair Helen has a confidence man as a playmate, a fact which is pregnant with possibilities. Now my theories are slightly punchdrunk."

"And what were those theories?"

"I was playing around with the idea that Philip Langdon might be the murderer."

"And why Brother Langdon?"

"As I said, I was thinking along lines that are always followed in mysteries of making the murderer the least-likely person present. Well, Langdon seemed the least likely and he also looks the least like a murderer. He looks more like the local rector or Sunday School superintendent. That method always seems to work in the books."

"If you follow that line of reasoning, what is wrong with Sidney Wilson?"

"I suppose the same reasoning would fit him," Frank admitted. "Picking Langdon was partly wishful thinking, I expect. He annoys me and Wilson doesn't. Langdon is just a little too pedantic and one-track minded for my taste."

"I talked with each of them for a short time last night," Van Dyke said. "Although there wasn't much chit-chat about telepathy, it struck me that Langdon was well-informed and that Wilson very conveniently agreed most of the time. With your mystery-book technique, you should have made something out of that."

"I suppose so."

"Now what about the new developments?" demanded Van Dyke.

"It seems to me that it presents two possibilities," Frank said. "One is that Sax Britt conveniently used the telepathy business as a means of getting into Joyce's house. If Davall hadn't fallen for it, he would have found some other way. After seeing Britt enter and remarking that there was something familiar about him, Joyce suddenly remembered why he was familiar. He probably guessed why Britt was there too. When they had all gone upstairs, he slipped down the back way and committed the murder.

"The other possibility is that Helen Peterson picked up a few tricks from her friend, the confidence man, and had some sort of confidence game she was going to work on Joyce. Britt found out about it and was trying to cut in for a blackmail share, as was his habit. Being a determined woman, she took care of him in another way.

"Both of these, it seems to me, are feasible. I admit I haven't the slightest idea which is the more likely."

"Good reasoning," growled Van Dyke. "In fact, damn good reasoning . . . But completely wrong . . ."

CHAPTER NINE

The old-fashioned house seemed almost deserted as Frank swung the Chrysler into the driveway. There wasn't even a policeman around.

Frank drove the car into the garage. He and Van Dyke walked back to the front door. The butler opened it before they could ring.

"Where is everybody, Harcourt?" Van Dyke asked as they entered.

"Mr. Joyce is out on the grounds, sir," the butler said. "Miss Lee is out in the kitchen with the policeman making some fudge, I believe. I think all the rest are in their rooms. Mr. Davall is, of course, upstairs dictating to Miss Walker."

"I want to take another look at the study," Van Dyke muttered to Frank, "and then I want a chance to sit down and think without your voice babbling in my ears."

They walked through the foyer into the large study. It was a big, pleasant room, with nothing now to suggest the corpse that had occupied it the night before. One wall was lined with books. The rest of the room was taken up with comfortable chairs, a television and radio set and a pinball game. There were five floor lamps in the room. Only the one next the chair Britt had occupied was in a difficult spot to reach. It was hemmed off by a small table.

"I just remembered something that's been bothering me all morning," Frank said. "I knew there was something that happened when Britt entered last night, but I couldn't recall it. Somebody behind me gasped when Britt came in sight."

"Somebody had probably taken bicarbonate of soda," Van Dyke said sourly. "Who was behind you?"

"Practically everybody, because I was twisted around in my seat to look at the door. I seem to have a feeling that I knew who it was at the time. You know how it is with something like that—you don't pay enough attention to remember."

"No, I don't know how it is, but I'm learning!" Van Dyke snapped. "I don't know why you bothered mentioning it at all. It was undoubtedly Joyce. Forget it." He was gazing out the door onto the screened porch. "An old-fashioned house like this is just made for skullduggery. There are four ways of getting in or out of this room. From the front hall, from the porch, from the library, or from the phone room. There are three exits from the house to the porch. One from this room, one from the living room, and one from the library. There might as well be four ways to come downstairs because the back stairs splits into three parts at the bottom. One part leads directly into the kitchen, one part directly into the dining room, and the third directly into the library. A veritable rabbit's warren!"

"Did I hear someone discussing the architecture of my home?" a voice asked, and Martin Joyce came into the room.

He was dressed in comfortable-looking tweeds and was very much the country squire, with his cheeks ruddy from having been outdoors.

"We were just looking over the murder room," Van Dyke said, "and commenting on how many different ways one could get in here."

"That's true," Joyce said. "I understand, however, that Lieutenant Crosbie has solved the murder."

"Still harping on Davall, eh?"

"I don't think so. He was pretty secretive about it, but I think he has someone else in mind."

"Oh, he has, has he," Van Dyke grumbled. "Then I don't suppose we have to worry our pretty little heads about it. Look here, Joyce, when did you take up the effete hobby of mental telepathy in place of chorus girls?"

Joyce grinned at the bluntness. "A man doesn't have to give up his old hobby because he takes up a new one," he said.

"I suppose not. How'd you become interested in telepathy? It wouldn't have any connection with bumps?"

"Through Davall. I've been interested in magic for several years, you know, so of course I knew Davall and had him out here several times. When he got interested in extra-sensory perception, he talked to me about it and I caught his enthusiasm. These experiments have proved very exciting. I've even been thinking about founding an extra-sensory perception Institute with—"

"Frank!" a voice called from the direction of the living room.

"That sounds like your huntress," Van Dyke said. "Stop gazing towards the door with that dying calf look and run along. I want to tell Joyce how much your plays stink anyway."

Frank grinned and hurried out.

He found Kalli in the living room. There was no one in sight. He took advantage of the fact to stem her flow of questions.

After a moment she pushed him away.

"What happened in town?" she asked.

"You never want to devote any time to important things," Frank grumbled.

"The important things are out of season now," Kalli answered. "Tell me what happened."

He told her about their visit to Whitey Gibbs and the two surprises Whitey had given them. Then he related what he could remember of the conversation between Van Dyke and himself on the way back.

"Do you like him, Frank?" she asked.

"Sure. He's as grouchy as a bear with a sore foot but he doesn't mean it. Anything happen here while we were gone?"

Kalli frowned. "I'm worried," she said. "Lieutenant Crosbie was asking me all sorts of questions about you, as though maybe he suspected you had something to do with it."

"Nonsense," Frank said. "He was probably just being curious about a future great playwright."

"Ah—good day," a new voice said. It was Sidney Wilson. "I hope I'm not intruding?" He cocked his head on one side and observed them with twinkling eyes.

"Not at all," Frank said, with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

"Most unfortunate—this tragic affair of last evening, was it not? Although from a purely scientific point of view, some of the telepathic results should be interesting. Extremely interesting. Don't you agree, Miss Walker?"

"I say, Sidney," Philip Langdon said, coming in before Kalli could answer, "I was wondering if Davall shouldn't drop a line to Warcollier about the results of last evening. If you remember, Warcollier devoted considerable time to telesthesia between a percipient and some person in the vicinity of the agent."

"Quite so, quite so," Sidney Wilson said, bobbing his head up and down. "I was just remarking to Miss Walker how interesting last night's results were. Ah—but the circumstances were most tragic. Most tragic."

"Of course," Langdon said. He seemed to notice Kalli and Frank for the first time. "Good day, Miss Walker—er—young man. Good afternoon, Miss Peterson."

"Is everyone gathering for the wake?" Helen Peterson asked sarcastically as she entered and sat down. She wore a handsome black and white afternoon frock that had been designed to make all other women look poorly-dressed. It seemed to Frank that she was paler than she had been the night before.

"No, for the kill," Renee Lee answered, coming in behind her.

She was looking quite animated. "Lieutenant Crosbie is rounding up Mr. Joyce and Mr. Van Dyke. He said for the rest of you to stay here until they come."

"So, you're second lieutenant," Helen Peterson said.

"Okay, baby," Renee said, shrugging. "I'm only telling you what he said. Do as you please."

Further clash between them was averted by the sound of Chariman Van Dyke's voice growling in the foyer.

"Confound it, stop looking so eternally pleased with yourself. I don't care if you've solved the riddle of the Sphinx!"

Van Dyke and Joyce entered the living room, followed by Lieutenant Crosbie. The detective was dressed with considerably more dash than he had been the night before and there wasn't much doubt that Renee was the reason. In addition to this, the lieutenant was looking very smug. He carried a pair of scissors in his right hand, although they were not the ones that had been used for the murder.

"I thought you were all set to put Davall in the electric chair," Van Dyke observed sourly.

"I wasn't really serious about that," Crosbie said good-naturedly. "I did suspect him in the beginning but only because his fingerprints were found on the table which you have to lean on if you want to light the lamp. But that was only a passing suspicion. Mainly I named Davall to make the murderer feel that he was safe. I was sure, even last night, that Davall couldn't have done it."

"Thanks," Davall said dryly. He was playing with a coin again, rolling it rapidly over the tops of his fingers, but his attention was on Crosbie.

"A lot of things came to light this morning," Crosbie said. "One showed up in the post mortem report and I'd like to test out a theory of mine about it if someone will help me. How about you, Bruce? Will you help me just a minute?"

Frank nodded. Something about Crosbie's too-casual attitude gave him a peculiar feeling in the stomach. But he didn't see how he could refuse.

"Okay," the lieutenant said. He sat down in a chair and handed the scissors to Frank. "Hold the scissors as you would to stab somebody and stand right in front of me," he said.

Frank grasped the scissors and took his stand in front of Crosbie. The room was so quiet he could hear Kalli's uneven breathing.

Chariman Van Dyke grunted scornfully.

"Now," Lieutenant Crosbie said, "you want to stab me in the eye but you want to be sure that the scissors don't glance off and only give me a nasty cut. In other words, you want to be sure that the scissors go straight into the eye instead of slanting in as they would if you just stabbed down at me. I want you to show me how you think the murderer might have managed to accomplish that. Go ahead, demonstrate it."

"I suppose," Frank said, feeling as hammy as the villain in a high school play, "he'd have to do it something like this."

He reached out and cupped his left hand under the detective's chin, tilting his head up. Then he stood there, with the scissors poised in the air directly in line with Crosbie's left eye.

"Thanks," Crosbie said, taking the scissors from Frank and getting up. "I imagined it must have been done that way. You see, the P. M. report showed that the scissors did enter the eye on a straight line, which meant that the head had to be tilted back or that the blow had to be struck from a much lower level—and that would be difficult.

"There are two important factors in solving a murder case. One is motive—in spite of Mr. Van Dyke's list of murders without motive—and the other is opportunity. It wasn't difficult to discover who had the best opportunity among you in the house, but discovering the motive was a little more difficult since everyone claimed that the victim was a complete stranger. Of course, it was obvious that someone was lying—but who?

"I started out on the premise that this Sax Britt was a phony. It seemed unlikely that there would be anything about these mind-reading experiments themselves to cause a murder. But if Britt was a criminal and someone else was here for criminal reasons or had been a partner in crime with Britt, there was more sense to the murder. My reasoning turned out to be right. Britt was a criminal."

He paused while everyone, except Van Dyke, Frank and Kalli, were duly impressed.

"Sax Britt's real name was Sim Bailey and he was also known as S. L. Boland and Bernard J. Somers. He was a confidence man and blackmailer." He paused again.

Martin Joyce looked pale but his hands were steady as he lit a cigar.

"Do you mean that one of my guests is the murderer?" he asked.

"I do," Crosbie said. "When you met Britt, Davall, did you talk to him about your work here?"

"Certainly," Davall said. "We talked for almost an hour. He seemed to be as well informed on extra-sensory perception as anyone I've ever talked to."

"He must have studied up on it," Crosbie said. "Confidence men are usually pretty smart and if they figure out a new racket, you can be sure they're well prepared before they start on it. I got Britt's history from the New York police and they told me that Britt usually operated in Florida.

"I'll confess I ran into a bit of luck there, but I found out who Britt wasn't a complete stranger to. Last year Britt had a horse racing game in Miami Beach, Florida. It's an old gag but people still fall for it. He set up a horse room, which was supposed to book bets for those who didn't want to drive out to Hialeah Park. Nobody knew that Britt had set it up, you see, or that it was completely phony and probably never took one legitimate bet.

"The way the game worked, Britt got a sucker who was interested in making money without being too particular how he made it, and told him about this horse room. His story was that he had managed to tap the private wire to the horse room so that the race at Hialeah was really over before the room got the flash that the race was starting. In other words, that they could bet there and know the winning horse when they made their bets. His story was that it had cost him so much to fix the wire that he and his friends couldn't make a real killing before the trick was discovered.

"A lot of people have fallen for this gag, so it must have sounded all right. This time, however, the Miami Beach police knew about it and were after him. They had detectives watching the place and they followed every person who helped to stage the thing. As a matter of record, the deal fell through for Britt and they weren't able to make an arrest. But they had the names of everyone involved and they told Britt and his associates to get out of town."

Lieutenant Crosbie stopped to light a cigarette. It was perfectly natural for him to find enjoyment in his own little theatricals and in the fact that everyone was giving him undivided attention.

All but one. Chariman Van Dyke, strangely enough, was staring beatifically at the spot where the wall and ceiling met. His face wore the expression of a young cherub about to take his first flight.

That, plus the fact that no face wore the ragged mask of guilt, disconcerted the lieutenant for a moment. Then he rallied his forces and went on.

"To come back, for the moment," he said, "to the question of opportunity, it seems to me there was one rather glaring fact that everybody ignored." He couldn't resist a glance at Van Dyke, but the latter was still absorbed in the wall.

"I don't know much about mind-reading or telepathy," Crosbie continued, "but from what Davall has told me, I gather that the four who caught the thoughts of both the victim and the murderer have what amounts to an alibi in their records of those thoughts, although I don't believe a court would accept that. Anyway, it isn't necessary.

"If we accept the fact that Davall was not the murderer, it brings up an interesting point. While I'm on the subject, I might as well say that Davall seemed the least likely suspect, in spite of my remarks last night. He stood to lose the most because of his experiments. I also believe that a man in his position is not apt to commit murder unless the motive is pretty damn big. Again too much to lose. Might as well say that Mr. Joyce is guilty."

There was a snort from the direction of Fuzzy Van Dyke; which everyone pretended to ignore.

"The interesting point I mentioned," continued Crosbie, "is that one person failed to hand in any report in last night's test. The conclusion would be that he had no time to fake notes and turn them in. Also he knew very little about telepathy and was probably afraid he would make a mistake if he did try to fake it. Another important point is that this person probably knew that Davall was in the habit of stopping in the kitchen for a cup of coffee as soon as the tests started and that he would be able to slip downstairs without being detected. He probably knew this because he is very close to someone who is in a position to know all of Davall's habits."

With a shock, Frank realized that nearly everyone was staring at him.

"I see most of you have realized what that means," Lieutenant Crosbie said. "It means that the person with the best opportunity to murder Sax Britt was—Frank Bruce."

It was like a bucketful of ice water in the face. Frank was so stunned all he could do was to say weakly, "Me?"

But if he was stunned, Kalli was not.

"You fool!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "Of all the dumb flatfeet—Fuzzy was right when he said you were a moronic hick cop. Fuzzy, why don't you—"

"Let him finish his interesting monologue," Van Dyke interrupted her mildly.

"Thank you, Mr. Van Dyke," Crosbie said, not without a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "I omitted to tell you in the beginning that the Miami Beach police named Frank Bruce as one of those who acted as a shill for Sax Britt. Bruce wasn't ordered out of town because he had already left and the police down there were lenient enough to say that they didn't think Bruce had been much more than a dupe.

"Careful checking shows that this business in Florida happened before Bruce's first play was produced last year. He was doing some radio writing, but he probably needed more money to run around with Miss Walker who was making good money herself as Davall's secretary."

"You dumb idiot, you!" Kalli said forcefully.

Crosbie ignored her, although his face flushed.

"So," he said, "that probably explains why Bruce got hooked up with Britt. In the meantime his first play was produced and I understand a second one is being produced. He was on the way to becoming a big shot. He was going to get married. And then Sax Britt shows up again.

"I think I mentioned before that a guy like Britt must have had a racket in mind before coming up here. That racket was blackmail. He was known to have done a lot of it in his time, mostly against other crooks. He saw one of his men starting to get somewhere in a legitimate field and decided to step in for a slice. He found out that Bruce would be here over the week-end and so he prepared his scheme to crash the party. Bruce recognized him when he saw him come in with Davall and must have guessed why Britt was here. He suddenly saw himself forced into the position of paying out everything he made in the form of blackmail.

"After Davall left him upstairs, he waited until he was sure Davall had settled down to his usual cup of coffee. Then he slipped downstairs and got the scissors. Britt was not surprised to see him, and he killed Britt quickly.

"Another thing that may have prompted Bruce to grab the scissors is the fact that four weeks ago he did a radio story in which a murder was committed with a pair of scissors. I heard the program myself, although I didn't know that Bruce had written it until today. So—"

"Frank," Kalli said firmly, "if you don't slug the bum, I will."

"Just a minute," Van Dyke said mildly enough. "Is that true, son, what he says about the business in Florida?"

"I'm not sure," Frank said uncertainly.

"What do you mean by that?" Crosbie asked sharply.

"I suppose it'll sound like something I made up," Frank confessed. "I had forgotten all about it. But Kalli will remember me telling her about it when it happened. She and Davall were in Florida, which is why I went there for two weeks. I was out for a walk one day, while Kalli was working, and a well-dressed man stopped me. It might have been Britt. I don't know. Anyway, he asked me if I wanted to make two hundred dollars. I thought there was some trick to it and said no. The man insisted. He said it had something to do with a practical joke. All he wanted me to do was take five dollars he would give me and go in this horse room and bet on a certain horse at a certain time.

"After all, I make my living by writing. This began to sound like a good plot, all made to order. I agreed and he gave me the five dollars. I went inside and I think I remember seeing several people in there. I bet the five dollars the way he told me and the horse won. I was handed two hundred dollars and left. I later described what had happened and got a pretty good description of the way the confidence game was worked. I've used the material in a couple of mystery-originals I did for radio. I told Kalli all about it at the time it happened."

"I remember it," Kalli said.

"Naturally, you would," said Lieutenant Crosbie. "A woman who wouldn't lie for the man she loves wouldn't be worth her salt. But let me get something straight. Bruce, you guessed that the guy was working some kind of a racket when he approached you?"

"Sure."

"But you went ahead and helped him out anyway?"

"I didn't do it to help him," Frank said. "I told you that I saw a chance to get some material as a writer. That's all I thought about. After all, it was still only a *guess* that he was running some kind of a racket. There were plenty of cops around there. If they didn't worry about it, I saw no reason why I should."

"You didn't think you were breaking the law?"

"I wasn't breaking the law," Frank said. "There's no law against a man giving me five dollars to bet on a horse!"

"A very smooth story," said Crosbie, "but no jury in the world would believe it. If you don't know the difference between right and wrong, then you ought to be locked up in a nice safe place. If you do know the difference, then you were guilty of being an accessory—whether it was before or after the fact, makes little difference."

"My sainted aunt!" roared Fuzzy Van Dyke, heaving himself out of his chair. He looked more natural now, glaring over the tops of his glasses. "Don't be a half-wit all of your life, young man! You haven't any more of a case than a cross-eyed ant eater."

"On the contrary," retorted Crosbie. "I—"

"Don't interrupt me," howled Van Dyke. "If you don't have brains, you might at least display some manners. I said you don't have a case and if you hadn't been more interested in flaunting your arrested puberty in the direction of that chorus girl, you'd know it yourself. If Frank is the murderer, what happens to that fancy idea of yours about the light being turned on and fingerprints being left on the table, eh?"

"I think we paid too much attention to that light," Crosbie said. He was still confident, but he was on the defensive, which was little wonder since Chariman Van Dyke had bullied more confident people than he. "Bruce could have turned on one of the other lights just as well."

"He could, eh? And this Britt sat there, grinning like a Mongolian idiot while Bruce walked up and stuck the knife in his eye?"

"He had no reason to be afraid," Crosbie said. "Besides he was in a state of hypnotism."

"Which Davall told you would have been broken by the light," Van Dyke retorted.

"By a light directly in his face. But if one of the other lights was turned on, it might not have done it."

"How would you like it if I told you that no light was turned on when the murder was committed?" Van Dyke said.

"You mean the murder was committed in complete darkness?"

"There'd be enough reflected light to show the position of the chair, according to Joyce."

"But not enough to be able to drive the scissors into a man's eye," Crosbie said triumphantly.

"What if I were to tell you that the murder was committed in such a way that it wouldn't have made any difference if it had been pitch dark?"

"Impossible."

"Don't flaunt your ignorance," retorted Van Dyke. "I'm telling you that the stage of darkness made no difference."

"You know a way that the scissors could have been put directly into the eye without being able to see the target?" Crosbie asked.

"I've known it from the beginning," snorted Van Dyke. "Now, you'll learn about it when I'm good and ready to tell you. I think part of your Holmesian deduction was based upon the fact that Britt knew Frank was going to be here and came out here for the purpose of meeting him to put his little blackmail scheme into operation. Was it?"

"Yes," admitted Crosbie.

"We'll ignore the fact that it would have been easier to see Frank somewhere else," Van Dyke said. He turned to Davall. "When did you get your letter from Britt?"

"Monday," Davall said.

"When did you make your appointment for yesterday?"

"I called him Tuesday and made the appointment."

"And when," Van Dyke asked, turning to Kalli, "was Frank invited here for the week-end?"

"Not until yesterday morning when I called him at the studio," Kalli said. "Oh, I see—"

"Don't you interrupt either," Van Dyke growled. "Did you even know Frank was coming before then?"

"No," she said. "I wanted him to come, but it wasn't until yesterday morning that I asked Mr. Joyce if I could invite him. And I hadn't said anything to Frank about it."

"Well?" Van Dyke demanded maliciously, turning back to Crosbie.

"I don't see where that changes anything except proving that part of my guesswork was wrong," the lieutenant said defensively. "It still doesn't change the fact that Bruce had both the opportunity and the motive."

"Motive, my grandmother!" exploded Van Dyke. "I've got more motive right now to commit murder than he ever had. If you'd ask a few more questions, as we did today, you would have also learned that Sax Britt made a habit of picking minor shills off the street that way because usually he was unable to get enough people to work with him. Didn't the Miami Beach police tell you that Frank was an innocent dupe?"

"Well, they said they didn't think he was guilty."

"Did they tell you why they thought that?"

"N-no," Crosbie said hesitantly.

"You mean they started to tell you but you had enough to make your case and wouldn't listen."

"Oh hell," the lieutenant said, running his hand through his hair. "I had all the main facts and I thought the man in Florida just wanted to talk. That call was costing enough as it was."

"And you thought you had the great Van Dyke right by the tail, didn't you?" Van Dyke demanded gleefully. "You were going to give it a good twist and spend the rest of your days telling the other privy cops how you gave the great man one on his whiskers?"

"Maybe my case has a few holes in it," admitted Crosbie, "but it still looks like the best bet. Can you tell me a better one?"

"Dozens," Van Dyke said, "but I won't."

"Maybe if you'd explain how the murder could have been committed in the dark—if it was—that would help clear things up."

"Don't tell him anything, Fuzzy," Kalli said.

"Now, look, Miss Walker," Crosbie said, "I know you're sore because I built up a case against your boy-friend, but you're not being fair. I—"

"We've got him on his knees now!" chortled Van Dyke.

"No sir," Crosbie said, his jaw tightening, "you haven't. I still say that the majority of the evidence points to Bruce."

"Were you maybe thinking about arresting Frank?" Van Dyke asked.

"Well—"

"Wouldn't like to have a suit for false arrest brought against Westchester County, would you?"

"Of course not."

"That's what will happen if you arrest him. You can take my word for that. I'll tell you how you can avoid that."

"How?"

"Some of your cow-faced detectives are outside on the grounds, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"So nobody can escape. Now you and the blonde go back to your love lives in the kitchen and forget this nightmare you just had. If you've got all the love out of your system, you might take another look around—say at the back stairs and maybe in the study again. You can't tell—a thought might hit you—only I don't know how you'd recognize it!"

CHAPTER TEN

Frank and Kalli were outside, standing beside the steps to the front porch.

"Frank, I'm frightened," she said. "It was almost as though someone were trying to frame you."

"Nothing like that," he said, patting her hand.

"Don't pat my hand that way. I'm not hysterical. But I'm frightened."

He had answered her absent-mindedly, while thinking over what had just happened, but now her tone of voice made him look up. He saw her golden red hair, her cool greenish eyes, her full lips, the soft curve of her breasts.

It reminded him that he was in love.

He reached out and pulled her to him. Her body pressed warmly against him. Her lips found his mouth. They clung like that for a moment, pliant, straining to be one. Then she moved her head and rested it on his shoulder.

"That's the way it should be, Frank," she said happily.

"I've been telling you that every time I've seen you for months," he answered, holding her closely.

"Let's get married tomorrow—no, Monday," she said impulsively.

"You mean it?" he asked, holding her away so he could see her face.

She nodded.

"I mean it," she said. "I was foolish not to say so before, but I guess I wanted to have my cake and eat it too. Here come Fuzzy and Davall. I'll run in and finish my typing."

She kissed him again on the mouth and then ran in the front door.

"No shame," grumbled Van Dyke, coming up. "Wipe that lipstick off your face and stop looking like the virgin bride just before she climbs under the covers!"

"She just said she'd marry me," Frank said.

"That's fine," Van Dyke said sarcastically. "There's a murderer running around here, you are teetering on the edge of the electric chair, and all you do is slobber at the mouth over the thought that she's going to marry you! If we had a few more morons around here, we could go into business!"

"Congratulations, Frank," Davall said, "even if it does mean that I'm going to lose a fine secretary. If I can do anything to help, Fuzzy, let me know. In the meantime, I want to go over the notes that were typed this morning."

"And all you can think of is your silly games," growled Van Dyke.

Davall grinned in reply, and entered the house.

"Do you suppose that Davall is mixed up in this after all?" Frank asked.

"My sainted aunt, no!" Van Dyke said. "But I don't like this."

"You don't like what?"

"I don't like anything about it. Unless we're almighty careful, we're going to find another corpse and it's going to be you."

"Me?" Frank exclaimed in surprise. "But why me? . . . Oh, you mean because Crosbie—"

"No, I don't mean because Crosbie jumped all over you, although that may have some bearing. It probably helped to plant the idea that you might make a very good fall guy and so we troop into your bedroom and find you a convenient suicide—the idea being that you felt the police had you trapped and took the easiest way out. It's the next obvious step for the murderer, if he's clever."

"That's silly," said Frank. "I could agree with your theory about me being the next victim, if you'd said it was because I heard someone gasp as Britt entered the house. The person who gasped must have been the murderer. But I didn't tell anyone but you."

"Will you forget that gasp?" demanded Fuzzy. "Somebody belches and you go and make a mystery out of it. The next thing you know you'll be writing stories like Sax Rohmer! And you probably did tell someone else besides me about the gasp, even if you don't know it."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember where we were when you told me?"

"In the big study. Why?"

"After you left, I accidentally discovered a microphone hidden in there. I didn't say anything about it to Joyce because I thought he might have planted it there himself. But when I went back to look at it a few minutes ago, the wire had been cut. So, whoever rigged it up must have been listening all the time and knew the microphone had been discovered. Now it can't be traced."

"So I'm going to be murdered in my bed and labeled a suicide," Frank said lightly, thinking to himself that Van Dyke was getting a little far-fetched in his theories. "In the meantime, while you're acting like a character out of a horror story, I'm going upstairs."

"If," said Fuzzy, "you are going up with the intention of having your way with the chambermaids, they're all over fifty and virgins."

"Impossible if they work for Joyce," Frank retorted. "I'm going up to rest. Just listening to you tires me out."

"Insufferable nincompoop," snorted Van Dyke. "If you—

Suddenly, he broke off, the expression on his face changing! He reached out and gave Frank a shove that sent him reeling into the rose bush, thorns tearing at the hand he automatically threw out. But the pricking of the thorns went almost unnoticed. Even as Frank struggled to regain his balance, he heard a splintering crash right beside him.

It was only a matter of seconds when Frank steadied himself and looked around. A wardrobe trunk was splintered on the ground, spilling gay colors over the grass. It lay in the exact spot where Frank had been standing when Van Dyke pushed him.

"So I talk like a horror story character, do I?" snarled Van Dyke. "That trunk, my little buttercup, was meant for what we laughingly call your head."

"It—it must have come from the roof," Frank said, reaction making his voice shake.

"And we might catch the person," Van Dyke said, lumbering toward the door. "Come on!"

A moment later they both rushed in through the front door and stopped. Lieutenant Crosbie and Renee Lee had just stepped into the hall, questioning looks on their faces. Joyce stood on the stairway, half turned around, looking back at them. Philip Langdon was framed in the doorway of the library.

"What happened?" Crosbie asked. "We heard a crash."

"Someone just pushed a trunk off the roof aimed at Frank's head," Van Dyke said. "Would you like to stand here and discuss it, or go upstairs and see if we can catch a murderer?"

Crosbie didn't bother to answer. Instead, he rushed up the stairs on the heels of Van Dyke who had not waited for an answer. The others followed silently.

The door to Davall's room was open and Davall, Kalli and Sidney Wilson were crowded in the doorway.

"What happened?" Davall asked.

Before anyone could answer, Kalli caught sight of Frank's bloody hand. She flew out into the hall.

"Darling!" she cried. "What happened?"

"Nothing serious," he said. "The bloody hand is from Fuzzy pushing me into a rose bush."

"You," roared Van Dyke, "are an insufferable ingrate! Someone tried to kill him and I saved his worthless hide. But all he bleats is 'Fuzzy pushed me into a rose bush!'"

"What's all the noise about?" another voice asked. It was Helen Peterson, standing in the doorway of her room. She wore a blue dressing gown. Her pale face was unemotional. Her hands were slowly shredding a blue handkerchief.

Chariman Van Dyke advanced down the hall, with the others trailing him, until he stood in front of her.

"Where were you?" he asked.

"In my room," she answered, backing into it. She seated herself in a chair facing the door and indicated a manicuring set on the table beside her. "I was removing my nail polish and then I intended taking a bath. Are there any other facts of my private life you'd like to know?"

"If there were, I don't doubt they'd be easy to learn," Van Dyke retorted. "Where were you, Lieutenant Crosbie?"

"In the dining room with Renee—Miss Lee."

"Mr. Langdon?"

"I was in the large study going through a rather interesting volume on extra-sensory perception," Langdon answered. He ran one hand through his white hair. "I ran across a passage which I wished to check with a book in my room and had just started up when I heard the crash."

"You, Joyce?"

"I had been in the small study," Joyce said, "and started up to my room just ahead of Mr. Langdon. I'm sorry this happened, Bruce, while—"

"Save the bouquets," Van Dyke growled. "Davall?"

"Miss Walker, Mr. Wilson and I were in my room for the past ten or fifteen minutes—ever since I came in, as a matter of fact."

"Now, young woman," Van Dyke said, turning back to Helen Peterson. "I noticed when we stopped at Davall's room that your door was not completely closed. Were you sitting in here with the door open?"

She bit her lip.

"Yes."

"Can you see the stairway to the attic from where you're sitting?" he asked, pointing to the stairway which was less than three feet away.

Her gaze followed the direction of his finger. She nodded.

"I thought so. Now who did you see on those stairs within the past five minutes?"

It seemed that everyone there held his breath while they waited for Helen Peterson to answer.

"Nobody," she said.

"Now wait a minute," Lieutenant Crosbie interrupted. He stepped up beside Van Dyke as though he had just remembered that he was in charge here. "Somebody had to go up through the attic to throw something down at Bruce. . . Unless there's another way to the roof?" He looked at Joyce.

"Those stairs are the only way to reach the roof without using a ladder from outside," Joyce said.

"Then what the hell's the idea of saying you didn't see anyone?" Crosbie demanded of Helen. "You had to see anybody who went up or down those stairs."

"I haven't seen anyone while I've been in my room," she answered.

"Look, sister," Crosbie said, advancing into the room, "if you want to play hard to get, you know I can take you into the station—maybe I will anyway. Who did you see on the stairs?"

"I'm not your sister and I didn't have to see anything," she answered, her voice rising. "What's more I didn't see anyone. Now get to hell out of my room! All of you!"

She straightened up and braced herself against the table. It seemed obvious to Frank that she was fighting to control herself, but he couldn't tell whether it was fear or anger. Her face was so white he could see a few freckles around her nose.

"If that's the way you want it—" Crosbie began grimly.

Chariman Van Dyke interrupted. "Let's look at the roof."

"But—" Crosbie began again.

"I said let's look at the roof," roared Van Dyke. "Let her take her bath like a lady and maybe she'll feel better then."

If anyone had told Frank that a literary critic could order a police lieutenant around and get away with it, he wouldn't have believed it; that is, before he had met Chariman Van Dyke. As it was, he not only did not blame Crosbie; he felt sorry for him. The lieutenant looked as if he were dying to make an arrest but he turned to follow Van Dyke without saying anything more.

Helen Peterson slammed her door. The lock clicked as she turned it.

It was only a few steps up to the low-ceilinged attic that ran the full length of the house. There was nothing there except a few boxes and the discarded bric-a-brac which attics automatically collect. Van Dyke went straight up to the roof. There was absolutely nothing there.

"Did you have a wardrobe trunk in the attic?" Van Dyke asked Joyce.

"I think there was an old trunk there," Joyce said, "filled with costumes from a masquerade I had here last year. Why?"

"That was the weapon," Van Dyke answered. He walked over to the edge and looked down to where the trunk was lying on the walk.

"Nothing up here," he grunted.

Lieutenant Crosbie had been walking around the edge of the roof and now completed the circle.

"No ladder," he said.

"It probably wouldn't have been left up anyway," Frank said.

"Do you have any ladders around that would reach here?" Crosbie asked Joyce.

"I suppose so, but you'll have to ask the gardener to be sure."

Without speaking, Van Dyke turned and started down the stairs again.

"You going to try to talk to her again?" Crosbie asked.

"I never talk to women while they're in the bath tub," Van Dyke growled. He seemed absent-minded. "Lieutenant, some of your men are still here?"

"Yes."

"How about your fingerprint man?"

"He's here too."

"Well, if you want to be functional, you might have them check that wardrobe trunk for fingerprints—but I don't think you'll find any."

As they passed Helen Peterson's door, they could hear the faint sound of water splashing.

"I took another look in the study as you suggested," Crosbie said, "but I didn't find anything."

"Of course not."

"What are you going to do now?" Crosbie asked.

"I'm going off somewhere so I can think, damn it," Van Dyke said. "And I'm taking Frank along so no one can arrest him or kill him."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Frank sat on the edge of the bed in the apartment over the garage while Chariman Van Dyke paced the floor. His flannel trousers and the gay sport jacket were so unkempt they looked as if they had been worn a week. He looked like a distant relative of the popular conception of the great Chariman Van Dyke. He had just finished a tirade against the unjust fates that were always handing him troubles. Now, for five minutes he had been pacing the floor, glaring at the ceiling as though it were a personal enemy.

"You look like the third act of Macbeth," Frank said lightly.

" 'Blow, wind! come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back,' " quoted Van Dyke. "If you are merely trying to impress me with the fact that you've read Macbeth, you're wasting your time. Stop trying to imitate a third-rate actor imitating a character from a play by Noel Coward. It doesn't become you. For that matter I don't know what does. I don't know why I save your life. There should be a law against saving the life of a playwright."

"I see you're getting back your old charm," Frank said. "You had me worried. You went ten minutes without insulting anyone."

"Don't change the subject—and be glad that you have the opportunity to be insulted by me. I have been paid as high as two thousand dollars to insult a group of morons for one hour. That makes approximately sixteen thousand dollars you owe me, Frog Face!"

"I've been wondering all day," Frank said, "why out of all the people murdered in the world each year, one of them isn't you."

"That would be killing the goose that lays the golden egg."

"You lay plenty of eggs but I didn't know they were golden."

"Don't be impertinent to your betters, urchin. Would you like to spend the rest of the day discussing my charm or may we devote a portion of the time to our murder?"

"I thought you were going to mastermind it right away," Frank said, "and tell us who the murderer is."

"I can do that now."

"You mean you know who the murderer is?" exclaimed Frank.

"I'm fairly certain," qualified Van Dyke, "but I'll be a pig-headed playwright if I know how to prove it."

"Joyce?"

"No. Helen Peterson."

"What's your evidence?" challenged Frank. "Just because she was seen with a confidence man?"

"That has nothing to do with it, except that it prompted me to ask a few questions about her."

"You mean that she's a phony too? That she isn't a Park Avenue debutante?"

"She's a debutante, all right, and she lives on Park Avenue with her mother, if that makes you feel any better. But I made another call while we were at the library and discovered that she and her mother have been completely impoverished the past three years. But very recently Helen began throwing money around again. She vaguely mentioned an inheritance, which is a lot of hog wash."

"I still don't see how that makes her a murderess."

"It doesn't, and it never will unless you keep your mouth shut. There's enough evidence to convince me but it wouldn't have much weight in law unless we can trick her in some way. Why do you think she's been scared to death ever since the murder last night?"

"You can't convict someone for being afraid," Frank said.

"Impudent pup! Don't forget we had already tagged Helen Peterson as being here to work some kind of confidence game. That may explain why she has been coming into money the past few months. I am also interested in the fact that she received no message last night when everyone else was busy catching them from both victim and murderer. There was a good reason why your hussy failed to do anything but doodle, but why Helen Peterson? And I was intrigued by the particular doodle she drew—and which Davall so conveniently interpreted for her as a picture of a piece of furniture. No one else seemed to notice that the center of it resembled a jail window."

"That's right," Frank said, remembering the peculiar design that had been on the sheet bearing Helen Peterson's name.

"When we talked to her a few minutes ago, I'll swear she was going to say her door had been shut until I mentioned noticing that it was open," Van Dyke said. "If, as she says, she was sitting in that chair, we are faced with two choices. One, that she did see someone go up and come down the stairs and is implicated with him. Two, that no one went up the stairs—which means that the wardrobe trunk walked up on the roof by itself and jumped down at you. If it were possible for the trunk to see you, I could believe that!

"If we take Number One, we have to eliminate Davall, Wilson, Kalli, the chorus girl, and probably the help. That leaves us Martin Joyce and Philip Langdon. Langdon would have had to race practically all over the house to make it back to the front stairs. Joyce could have run down to the front stairs and then pretended to be climbing again. Or we can think that Joyce, Langdon and Peterson were in it together—which even you will admit is far-fetched."

"Also," Frank said slowly, "I would guess it would be impossible for Langdon to have come down by way of the back stairs and reach the front stairs while we were running less than a dozen feet. At the same time, I find it a little difficult to picture Martin Joyce flying down the hallway and doing an about face on the stairs. He's hardly the running type, if you know what I mean. And if I remember correctly, he was not breathing fast when we came in."

"At least your powers of observation are improving through association," Van Dyke approved. "That leaves one remaining alternative. Helen Peterson did not see anyone on the stairs because she wasn't in her room. And she wasn't in her room because she was up on the roof trying to push that trunk down on your pretty little noggin. Then all she had to do was nip down into her room and there was plenty of time to catch her breath."

"It sounds logical," admitted Frank, "but wasn't that trunk a little heavy for a girl to drag from the attic to the roof?"

"That doesn't worry me much. It was a small trunk, as trunks go, and it wasn't heavily packed. Peterson looks like an athletic piece, in which case she could probably manage it nicely."

"If you were so sure she was guilty, why didn't you let Crosbie question her further?"

"Because her resistance was built up then, despite her fear. But after she's had a nice warm bath and sat around for a while worrying, she may soften. I think our only chance on the murder is to make her break down. Otherwise there will be only circumstantial evidence."

"You mentioned earlier that you knew the murder had been committed in the dark. Could she have done it?"

"Anybody could, my pet," Van Dyke said, still frowning. "The way the murder was committed really has no meaning. All that filly-faddle about who turned on what light and why was a waste of time." He pulled out his watch and glanced at it. "Of which we do not have a plethora."

"You mean there isn't much time to solve the case if you're going to be able to tell your radio audience about it tonight."

Van Dyke glared. "Some day I'll drop poison in your beer."

"I don't drink beer."

"Then I'll drop it in your milk!" roared Van Dyke. "Don't quibble! We can round up that love-sick detective soon and try Miss Peterson again. If we can't pin the murder on her, at least we can send her to prison for her confidence games and keep her out of circulation for a time."

"How can you prove that on her if you can't prove the murder?" Frank wanted to know. "It seems the two are tied together—if that's what she was working here—since it gives her the motive."

"I don't mean here," Van Dyke said. "I mean before. The other thing I learned about Helen Peterson today was that up to about a month ago she was —"

"Fuzzy," a voice called from outside.

Van Dyke slammed up a window and stuck his head through.

"Gawdam it," he howled, "there's a conspiracy around here to keep me from finishing what I have to say. First a trunk interrupts me and now you! What do you want, charlatan?" He glared down at Davall.

"I don't want anything," Davall said cheerfully, "but Lieutenant Crosbie requests the pleasure of your charming company on the second floor of the Joyce manse."

"What does he want?"

"I don't know. I didn't even see him. He sent one of his bloodhounds a-knockin' at my door to tell me to find you. Aside from that, I know nothing."

"I know it," growled Van Dyke. "Don't brag about your ignorance."

"But if you ask me to guess," Davall continued, "I'd say it has something to do with Miss Peterson. I think he's in her room."

Van Dyke slammed the window and glared at it when it had the temerity to rattle.

"Come on," he said to Frank. "If that mutton-head has beaten me to it, I'll whale him over the head with his own handcuffs."

* * *

The front stairway was guarded by the same detective who had tried to stop their car that morning. But he only grinned at the sight of Van Dyke and waved them on up the stairs.

The door to Helen Peterson's room stood open. Lieutenant Crosbie met them at the door, a grim smile on his face.

"We were close all right," he said, speaking to Van Dyke. "Too close for her comfort. She committed suicide."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Van Dyke only grunted and stepped into the room. Crosbie walked ahead to the bathroom door and pointed.

Helen Peterson lay on her back in the bath tub, her nude marble body still wet although there was no water in the tub.

She was dead.

Her face was not pretty. Her mouth was open and her face wore an expression of horror. Frank shuddered and automatically glanced at her body.

"She was a *blonde!*" he exclaimed and blushed as soon as he had said it.

"That's what I was trying to tell you when Davall interrupted," grumbled Van Dyke in an undertone. "She dyed her hair about a month ago."

Van Dyke turned and walked back into the bedroom. He stood there in the middle of the floor, staring at the neat pile of clothing on the bed.

"This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't interrupted me when I was going to arrest her," Lieutenant Crosbie said. "But maybe it's just as well. We probably couldn't have proved it unless she confessed."

"You mean that you think she murdered Britt?" Van Dyke asked, looking around.

Crosbie nodded.

"I got to thinking about it while I was down stairs checking on that trunk," he said. "Incidentally there were no fingerprints on it . . . Anyway, I was thinking over this business of trying to kill Bruce. The servants can be eliminated. Renee—Miss Lee was with me. Davall, Wilson and Miss Walker alibied each other. Langdon would have had to make it down from the roof in about ten seconds flat, and go by me. Joyce was out because I saw him in the foyer just before the crash. So that left nobody but her. I guess she realized it too and took the easiest way out."

"If my percipients keep on dying," Davall said, "people will begin thinking I'm a jinx."

"How did you find her?" Van Dyke asked.

"When I decided that she had to be it, I came right up to question her. There was no answer when I knocked on her door even though I knocked loud enough for it to be heard all over the house.

All the doors here have Yale locks on them and we heard her lock the door—remember? But I thought Joyce would have duplicate keys to all the rooms, which he did. I got the key for this room, told Rawson to keep everyone downstairs and came back up with Nelson. I knocked again and when there was no answer I unlocked the door and came in. I thought maybe she had gotten out some way and was trying to escape. Instead I found her like that. I sent Nelson down to ask Davall to bring you."

"You sent for the Medical Examiner?"

"Yeah. Nelson phoned him after he saw Davall. But it's suicide all right."

"Why is all the water drained out of the tub?" Van Dyke asked.

"She probably threshed around when she was drowning and her arm hit the knob that opens the drain."

"I had just finished outlining to Frank all the reasons why Helen Peterson was guilty of Britt's murder and the attempt on him," Van Dyke said, "and was concluding with the information that normally she was a blonde, which might tie her in with a series of crime. But I'm just as big a damn fool as you are, Lieutenant. I filly-faddled around with a lot of chit-chat and let another murder be committed! You, too, you ten-cent-store-detective!"

"What are you talking about, Fuzzy?" Davall asked.

"She," snorted Van Dyke, jerking a thumb towards the bathroom, "was murdered. Suicide, my grandfather's mustache cup!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Lieutenant Crosbie stared at him as though he thought Van Dyke was out of his mind.

"But that's impossible," he said finally.

"Oh, is it?" growled Van Dyke. "It was also impossible for anyone to push a trunk over the edge of the roof but they bloody well did it. Why is it impossible?"

"In the first place, the door was locked . . ."

"And there was a duplicate key, which you now have."

"But Joyce had that all the time."

"Exactly. Although I don't think the key was needed."

"Meaning what?"

"I can tell you when the murder took place. She was killed within ten minutes after we went downstairs."

"Well, it was only twenty-five minutes from the time we went down until I was back up here," Crosbie said, "but how can you tell it was within ten minutes?"

"The same way I can tell she was murdered. She still hadn't undressed for her bath when the murderer knocked at the door. It was someone with whom she was intimate enough to permit into the room. The murderer knocked her out, undressed her, drowned her in the tub, probably accidentally opened the drain. Then he left and the lock snapped shut as he closed the door behind him. The whole thing shouldn't have taken him over five or six minutes."

"But that theory points to Joyce too," Davall said. "He was the only one who was intimate with her to the point of entering her room at all. I don't think either of the other two girls have ever been in her room. But she would let him in. . ."

"Don't be so damned esoteric," Van Dyke said. "The lieutenant is on the verge of emerging from adolescence so he might as well learn the facts of life. Davall is trying to say that Joyce bedded with the wench so she wouldn't have minded him coming in no matter how she was dressed."

"Now, wait a minute," Crosbie said, looking worried. "You're jumping ahead too fast. There's no proof of murder in anything you've said. It still looks to me like she saw we were getting close to her and took an out."

"So you want proof," grumbled Van Dyke. "If you'll take the trouble to examine that bath tub, you'll find it would have been practically impossible for her to hit the plug that drains the tub. The knob is on top of the tub and has to be pressed down, which means she had to raise up and lean on the knob. Even you must admit that seems an impossible task for someone who is occupied drowning.

"Another thing that escaped your eagle eye is a slight bruise on her jaw just to the right of her chin. That spot, in the boxing fraternity, is known as the button. It is possible that she could have gotten that threshing around in the tub, but then there would have been other bruises on her.

"Now if you'll have one of the girls come in here for a minute, I'll give you proof that someone else undressed her—and not with loving care."

"Nelson," Crosbie called.

A young detective stepped in from the hall and looked at the lieutenant.

"Go down stairs and bring Miss Lee up here," Crosbie said.

The detective vanished into the hall.

Lieutenant Crosbie turned and walked into the bathroom. He stood there a moment, gazing down at the body of the dead girl. Then he came back into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

"I think you're right about her not being able to have drained the tub, even accidentally," he said slowly.

"Right?" snorted Van Dyke. "I'm always right! I haven't been wrong since I was two months old! The murderer was hoping that you'd think it was suicide and close the case."

"But, good heavens, Fuzzy," Davall said, "are you hinting that Joyce is the murderer?"

"What are you getting so excited about?" demanded Van Dyke. "You've known all along that someone here had to be a murderer. Don't start throwing up your hands like an old maid who sees a mouse!"

"But it doesn't seem possible that Joyce is the murderer!"

"You mean your precious experiment won't have any backer if he is," Van Dyke said. "As a matter of fact, I didn't say he was."

"But I thought you said—"

"All I said was that Joyce had a key to this room so the fact that it was locked had no meaning," Van Dyke snapped.

"But what about Joyce's motive?" Frank asked.

"Not now," Van Dyke said quickly. "So, Lieutenant—"

"Wait a minute," Crosbie said. "What's this about Joyce's motive? Do you know of a motive?"

"In a way, yes," Van Dyke admitted, giving Frank a dirty look, "but I'll be eternally damned if I'm going to tell you. And I'll throttle Frank with that nauseating tie he's wearing if he tells you! If you knew, you'd only go galloping around like an emasculated bull and play hell with everything."

"I don't mind you playing detective," Crosbie said grimly, "but withholding information from the law is another—"

"Bah!" interrupted Van Dyke. "Don't try any threats on me, you correspondence-course detective, or I'll leave your name out of my broadcast tonight."

"He sounds like a Hollywood columnist," Renee Lee said, coming into the room. She looked at Crosbie. "What's cookin', Dick?"

Lieutenant Crosbie tried to pretend that he hadn't heard the way she addressed him, but he reddened.

"Mr. Van Dyke wants to prove something with your aid," he said.

"What's wrong?" she asked. She looked at the clothing on the bed, then at the closed bathroom door. "Has something happened to Peterson?"

"She's dead," Crosbie said.

"As my old grandmother would say—if I had an old grandmother—good riddance. I'm not surprised."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she was a bitch, so it isn't surprising that somebody bumped her off," Renee explained, shrugging. She glanced at Van Dyke. "What do you want? Some help in giving a medal to her murderer?"

"If," Chariman Van Dyke said, "you were wearing shoes and stockings, panties, a brassiere and a dressing gown, in what order would you take them off?"

"What is this?" Renee Lee said, arching her eyebrows. "I've heard of old goats who wanted to be whipped, but this is a new one on me. Do you get fun out of asking questions like that?"

"Dammit," howled Van Dyke, "stop acting like a ten cent copy of Madame DuBarry and answer the question!"

"Go ahead," Crosbie said as she looked at him.

Van Dyke was still glaring at Renee Lee over the top of his glasses, to the secret amusement of Davall and Frank.

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "I'd take off the dressing gown first, then the shoes and stockings. After that would come the panties and then the brassiere last. What I'd do after that would depend . . ."

"You have the moral turpitude of a rabbit," Van Dyke said. "Now, begone."

"I want to stay and see the fun."

"I'm afraid you can't," Lieutenant Crosbie said, attempting to be curt. "Wait downstairs."

Renee pouted, but she turned and left the room.

"Just what was the idea of that?" Crosbie asked Van Dyke when she was gone.

"Look at her clothes," Van Dyke said. He walked over to the bed. "From the relative positions of the garments on the bed, it is obvious that the dressing gown was removed first, then the brassiere, then the panties, and after that the stockings and shoes. There may be some slight variation, but I imagine most women undress in much the same fashion as Renee Lee, and I personally doubt if any woman removes her brassiere until she's taken off everything else. These clothes were removed as if taken off a completely limp body, working from the head down. You'll notice that the stockings are still rolled up and a woman as meticulous as Helen Peterson would certainly have unrolled them before going in to her bath."

"You're probably right," Lieutenant Crosbie said, "but it wouldn't be acceptable in court."

"Who cares?" Van Dyke said. "I was just trying to beat into your juvenile brains the fact that Helen Peterson didn't commit suicide."

"Well, you've succeeded," Crosbie said grimly. "This murder might not have happened if I hadn't let you—anyway, there won't be any more! Nelson!"

The plainclothesman stepped in from the hall again.

"You and Rawson," Crosbie said crisply, "round up everyone downstairs except the servants. I want everybody in their rooms and you and Rawson see that they stay there. Get them up here right away."

"Okay," the detective said.

"You too, if you don't mind, Mr. Davall," Crosbie said.

Davall nodded and left.

Lieutenant Crosbie turned to Van Dyke.

"No you don't, Bat Face," Van Dyke growled, "although I ought to go to my room and let you stumble to your own doom. But I won't."

"All right, but Bruce—"

"He goes where I go," Van Dyke interrupted firmly. "Then I'll personally see that nothing happens to him. With the house overrun with cops, it isn't safe to be alone!"

"Okay," Crosbie said, "I guess it won't do any harm. There isn't going to be any more amateur bungling in this case."

"You're getting awfully cocky all of a sudden," Van Dyke said sourly. "Going to push your betters around and uncover clues right and left, are you?"

"I am going to find out exactly where everybody was and why, when Britt was killed, when Bruce was attacked, and when Peterson was killed. There's bound to be a flaw somewhere, although if Joyce has a motive, I'll bet that's where the flaw is. He hasn't any too good a reputation anyway, has he?"

"Do your own key-hole peeping," Van Dyke retorted.

He looked, Frank thought, like a child who had been told he had to stop playing.

"I intend to," Crosbie said firmly. "If it'll make you happy, come along."

He stepped out into the hall and waited until Van Dyke and Frank joined him. Then he pulled the bedroom door shut and made sure that the lock had snapped.

Two detectives were leaning against the wall, midway down the hallway.

"Everybody in?" Crosbie asked them.

"Right," the one called Nelson said.

"Okay. You come along with me, Nelson, and take down everything. Rawson, the Medical Examiner, should be here any minute. Here's the key to the room where the girl is. Tell Doc that I want him to take a good look at the bruise on the girl's jaw. After he and the photographer are through, they can take her away. You stay in the hall and be sure that no one leaves his room. If you have to, handcuff them in. Are King and Brown on the grounds?"

"Yeah," the cop said.

"Come on, Nelson."

"Officious," Van Dyke muttered as he and Frank followed the two detectives to Davall's room.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Davall was playing with a deck of cards, his fingers seeming to have a life all their own, as they entered.

He looked up and smiled.

"The Third Degree, eh, Fuzzy?" he said lightly.

Chariman Van Dyke snorted loudly.

"Cossacks!" he said succinctly.

"I will ask the questions, Mr. Davall," Lieutenant Crosbie said, "without interruptions, I hope. I made a mistake last night, but I'll make up for it now."

"Hey," Van Dyke said, staring suspiciously at Crosbie, "what was this mistake you made last night? I don't like the way you said that."

"We'll pass it for the time being," Crosbie answered evenly. "Now, Mr. Davall, I want to go over last night's events once more briefly. You personally saw that Miss Peterson, Miss Lee, Miss Walker, Mr. Langdon, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Joyce went upstairs a few minutes before eight. Is that right?"

"It is," Davall said, not taking his eyes from the cards. He was carelessly dealing out five poker hands, but the one forming in front of himself was assuming the aspect of a straight flush.

"You then came back downstairs and went into the large study where the man you knew as Sax Britt was waiting?"

"Yes."

"He was alive at that time?"

"Yes."

"Why did you go in at that time?"

"To tell him the object which he was to concentrate on," Davall answered, admiring his five poker hands a moment before picking them up. "I had waited until then to be sure there would be no opportunity for collaboration between the agent and one of my percipients. It was the usual way I worked."

There was a grunt from Van Dyke, but no one paid any attention and he didn't offer to elaborate.

"How long were you in there with him?"

"About ten minutes. It lacked only a half minute or so to eight o'clock when I left him."

"The light was on then?"

"He turned it off just as I reached the foyer," Davall said.

"He was going to put himself into a state of hypnosis?"

"So he said. Since you say he was a criminal, it is doubtful if he intended to or could do so."

"But you believed him then?"

"I had no reason not to."

It seemed to Frank that the scratch of the detective's pencil on his pad was extraordinarily loud.

Frank stared out of the window and tried to whip his brain into some activity that would solve everything. It was useless. He glanced at Van Dyke but the latter was a red-cheeked Buddha wearing glasses. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

Or if he was.

"What did you do then?" Crosbie asked.

"I went into the kitchen and asked the butler to bring me a cup of coffee," Davall said. He spread the cards along the table and then flipped them all over with one finger. "Then I went back into the dining room and sat at the table."

"You didn't tell him where to bring it?"

"He knew I usually had coffee every night after the test started."

"How long before he brought it?"

"Maybe five minutes."

"After bringing in the coffee, the butler returned to the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"Then," Crosbie said slowly, "you were the last person to see Britt alive?"

"Except for the murderer," Davall answered with a brief smile.

"But you could have easily slipped in and murdered him without anyone knowing it? And he wouldn't have been frightened at seeing you appear and turn on the light?"

There was another grunt from Van Dyke.

"Stop grunting," Crosbie said. "I haven't forgotten your theory about the murder being committed in the dark but you haven't proved it and until you do I will assume that the light was on. Well, Mr. Davall?"

"I could have," Davall agreed, "but I didn't."

"Did you know those particular scissors were in the living room?"

"I knew they were there earlier," Davall said. "I used them in a cut-and-restored-rope trick which I performed in there for Joyce earlier."

"I think you told us that you had a talk with Britt at his hotel before you brought him out last night?"

"Yes."

"And you were convinced that he was an expert in telepathy?"

"At least, that he knew a great deal about it."

"And you said that Britt told you he didn't know any of the people here?"

"Not exactly that. He didn't see them, but he told me that he didn't recognize any of the names. I suppose it amounts to the same thing."

"All right. Now we'll come up to the attack on Bruce. Where were you when that happened?"

"In my room with Mr. Wilson and Miss Walker," Davall said promptly. "We had been there together for about ten minutes before it happened."

"Where were you when Miss Peterson was murdered?"

"I don't know exactly when she was murdered," Davall said, "but I'd guess I was in my room. I went there right after we came off the roof and was there until you sent this detective to ask me to find Fuzzy."

"You've been a professional magician for a good many years, haven't you?"

"A few," Davall admitted.

"Ever do any escape work?"

"Some."

"Then, if you had to, you could pick a lock like the one on these doors?"

"So that's the way the wind blows," Davall said mildly. "Still trying to pin your hocus pocus on me. I probably could pick the lock in time, but I don't see why it was necessary for the person who entered her room."

"Why?"

"I hate to mention it, but there was a slight flaw in Fuzzy's argument when we were in Miss Peterson's room. First he said that the murderer must have had a key or been on intimate terms with her in order to gain admission while she was undressed. Then he demonstrated that the murderer had entered before she undressed. In view of the fact that she was sitting in her room earlier with the door open, wearing the same clothes, it would seem that almost anyone could have gotten her to open the door. Therefore, no picking of locks was necessary. Besides, Miss Walker was with me the entire time, going over what she had typed, so she can swear that I didn't leave the room."

"She worked for you long?"

"About three years."

"Isn't it possible that she might lie for her employer?"

"Wait a minute," Frank exclaimed indignantly.

"Sit down," Crosbie said levelly. "Your turn will come. Well, Davall?"

"No," Davall said shortly.

"All right," Lieutenant Crosbie said, rising. "You'll have to stay in your room for the present. I may want to talk to you again later."

He turned and strode from the room. The detective, Van Dyke and Frank trailed after him.

Davall went back to his card playing.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The door to Davall's room had just closed behind them when the Medical Examiner popped out of Helen Peterson's room at the other end of the hall. He was a small, nervous man with a perpetual smile. He bobbed his head in Crosbie's direction and the lieutenant went to meet him.

Chariman Van Dyke stared innocently at the ceiling.

Frank was curious. He hadn't known Van Dyke long but he felt that this meekness wasn't natural. Something must be stirring in Van Dyke's mind but there was no hint of it in the cherubic face.

Crosbie came back and the Medical Examiner hurried on down the stairs.

"He says that the bruise on her jaw might have been caused by a blow from a fist," Crosbie said grudgingly to Van Dyke.

"Is that so?" Van Dyke said with exaggerated courtesy.

Lieutenant Crosbie glanced at him sharply; he too wondered what was delaying the storm. Then, shrugging, he knocked on the door directly across from Davall's room.

"Come in," a voice called.

They stepped into Martin Joyce's bedroom. This room and the one Davall occupied served as Joyce's private suit, but he had given up his living room to Davall and was confining himself to the bedroom until the tests were over.

Martin Joyce looked up and his face was haggard. "Is it true, Lieutenant, that Miss Peterson is dead?" he asked.

"It's true. How did you learn it?"

"Miss Lee told us when she came downstairs a few minutes ago. But, good heavens, who would want to kill Miss Peterson? She was such a lovely girl . . ."

"We intend to find out, Mr. Joyce," Crosbie said.

"Naturally I'll help all I can," Joyce said. "But it hardly seems necessary to keep us all locked up here."

"If I had done this in the beginning," Crosbie said, "there might not have been a second murder. We'd like to hear an account of your actions last night again."

"You mean after Davall came back?"

"Yes."

"Well," Joyce said, "I believe it was about ten minutes before eight when Davall asked us to go to our rooms to begin the test. I came up directly, with the others, to this room. I sat down at that small writing desk there and composed myself to receive the thought waves. As you know, I was fairly successful in receiving impressions, at least in the early part of the test. About nine o'clock I heard Miss Lee scream and went downstairs to find Britt dead."

"You weren't out of your room at all between eight and nine?"

"No."

"Did anyone come to your room during that time?"

"No. Not until Davall came at about nine."

"Now, Mr. Joyce," Lieutenant Crosbie said, taking a deep breath, "you told us last night that you did not know the murdered man?"

It seemed to Frank that Joyce's color changed but he answered evenly enough.

"That's right."

"We have reason to believe that isn't true," Crosbie said. "We have evidence that you did know him, perhaps under his real name of Sim Bailey, and that you hated him."

Joyce had paled even more at the beginning of Crosbie's sentence but by the end he was smiling and slowly regained his color.

Van Dyke grunted disdainfully.

Crosbie, Frank knew, had with his last few words given away the fact that he was bluffing. According to what Whitey Gibbs had told Van Dyke, there was certainly no reason for Joyce to have hated Britt. Crosbie had only revealed that he didn't know the real circumstances.

"What is your evidence?" Joyce asked.

He took a cigar from the stand beside his writing desk, carefully clipped off the end and lit it.

"That will come out later," Crosbie said. His expression indicated that he realized he had blundered somewhere. "Did you know Sax Britt, or Sim Bailey?"

"I told you that I didn't," Joyce answered. "My dear Lieutenant, I rather doubt that you'll make much headway if you go around trying to browbeat anyone into a confession."

"I'll decide that," Crosbie said shortly. He tried a new attack. "You were having an affair with Helen Peterson, weren't you?" he asked bluntly.

"Say that we were friendly," Joyce suggested.

"They call it more than that around here," Crosbie retorted. "But suppose Helen Peterson knew Britt and . . ."

"As a matter of fact, I think she did," Joyce surprised everyone by saying.

"And you discovered that the two of them were working some game on you?" Crosbie said triumphantly.

"Nothing of the sort," Joyce said promptly. "Miss Peterson was not that sort. But I had a feeling that she not only knew Britt but was perhaps frightened of him."

"What did she tell you?"

"She didn't tell me anything. But as Davall entered the front door with Britt, we all had a brief glimpse of him. At the time, Miss Peterson and I were sitting together and her hand was lying on top of mine. As Britt entered, her hand clutched convulsively. Later I asked her if anything had been wrong and she said no. But I'm sure she was evading."

"But you have no idea how or where she knew him?"

"No."

"But you could have slipped downstairs the back way and killed Britt between eight and nine without being seen?"

"I suppose I could have—but I didn't."

"Did you know the scissors were in the living room?"

"I knew they were in there earlier when Davall was doing a rope trick for us, although I wasn't aware they were still there."

"Where were you when the attack on Frank Bruce took place?"

"I'm not sure exactly when it took place, but I was on the stairs when Bruce and Van Dyke entered."

"It was just about four o'clock when the attack happened, wasn't it?" Crosbie asked, turning to Van Dyke.

Van Dyke grunted something that sounded like "yes" and continued to stare at the ceiling.

"Where were you for, say, ten minutes before you started upstairs?" Crosbie asked, turning back to Joyce.

"In the small study," Joyce said promptly. "I came out and started upstairs to my room. You were sitting in the dining room with Miss Lee at the time."

"Yes, I saw you," Crosbie said. "Now what did you do after we came down from the roof?"

"I went back into the small study."

"A few minutes before you had started for your room. Why didn't you go there?"

Joyce smiled wryly. "To be truthful, I had forgotten the reason for going. The first sign of old age, I suspect."

"Was there anybody else in the small study with you?"

"No."

"You were there how long?"

"Until you came down for my keys, telling me there was something wrong with one of the doors. I knew that wasn't true, of course, but I had no idea what had happened. I tried to come up a little later but one of your detectives stopped me at the stairs. I then stayed in the living room until you had us go to our rooms."

"But you were in the small study from the time we left the roof at about four-fifteen until I came for your keys at about a quarter to five?"

"Yes."

"You weren't out of the room at all?"

"No."

"Then you have no alibi for the time when Miss Peterson was killed?"

"I suppose not," Joyce admitted, "but I assure you that I didn't kill her. Even if I had wanted to get rid of her, there are easier ways—if you are a rich man."

"So I've heard," Crosbie said contemptuously. "Please stay in your room for the present."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"I'd be happier," grumbled Lieutenant Crosbie when they were out in the hall again, "if more people in this case had alibis. It seems that nobody has an alibi."

"You'd be happier if there weren't any case," Van Dyke said, but the old Van Dyke fire was lacking.

Crosbie opened his mouth to answer, but instead he turned and strode down the hall. The others followed.

Crosbie walked to the far end of the hall and knocked on the door of the room occupied by Philip Langdon.

"Yes?" Langdon called.

Crosbie opened the door and stepped inside. Langdon looked up from a book he was reading, then put the book to one side regretfully.

"We want to ask you a few questions," Crosbie said. "You know that Miss Peterson has been killed?"

"Miss Lee so informed us in the living room," Langdon said. "I was not well acquainted with Miss Peterson, but it is always unfortunate when a human life is taken."

"Did you catch any thought waves from the murderer this time?" Crosbie asked, not bothering to veil the sarcasm in his voice.

"You are obviously not familiar with extra-sensory perception," Langdon said, being slightly patronizing in turn. "The percipient must prepare himself for the reception of the thought waves."

"Do you have the correct time, Mr. Langdon?" Van Dyke interrupted.

Langdon glanced at his wrist watch and frowned.

"My watch seems to have stopped," he said. He began winding it.

"It's ten after six," Crosbie said.

"You'll have to hurry if you're going to make the broadcast," Frank added, with a grin.

Van Dyke scowled at him but said nothing. He resumed his careful study of the ceiling.

"I believe that you are an expert on telepathy, aren't you?" Crosbie asked Langdon.

"I am a student of it," Langdon corrected.

"I meant that you apparently know more about it than anyone else here, including Davall. Wouldn't you say that this business of four of you apparently catching the thoughts of the murderer last night was rather odd?"

"Not exactly odd," Langdon said. He placed the tips of his fingers together in a professorial attitude and frowned. "Unusual, perhaps, but not odd."

"Would you like to explain that?" Crosbie asked.

"Certainly. In a way, we might call the state of being ready to receive extra-sensory perceptions as leaving the external world. To do that we must abolish perceptions:- first, visual perceptions by sitting in darkness or by staring fixedly at blank paper, and next auditory perceptions by remaining in silence. First the after-images, the phosphenes and the retinal light lay siege to the memories. All of these must be discarded. After this, the memory images of the day may appear and are in turn extinguished.

"In addition it is important to also put aside all psychic inductors, although this is not always possible. The psychic inductors over which we have the least control are those of the imaginative associations, analogous to the content of our daydreams."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" Van Dyke exclaimed before Langdon could go on. He heaved himself up out of the chair and left the room, slamming the door behind him.

If anything, Lieutenant Crosbie seemed pleased at his going.

"You were saying, Mr. Langdon?" he asked.

"Oh yes," Langdon said eagerly. "One thing we might consider is the hypothesis of a current rather than a wave between agent and percipient. Or, you might say, the personality is a center from which escape psychic elements, possessing a tension which makes them perceivable to subjects in a passive state. This may mean that the mind of Mr. Britt was tuned in with the mind of the murderer and, in turn, our minds were on the same current as Mr. Britt's and the message was thus relayed to us.

"On the other hand, we may have accidentally happened upon the current from the murderer's mind. Such an accident happened in 1935 when one of the percipients, attempting a new method of fixation, put his attention on a phosphorescent disk in the center of which there was a circle of black velvet. He was the only one who knew about the disk, yet one of the other percipients drew a circle with a smaller black circle in the center of it.*

"Whichever course we find applicable, I'm sure that the results of last night will startle the telepathic world."

***Reported in Experiments in Telepathy by Rene Warcollier, Harper and Brothers, 1938.**

As he finished, Langdon beamed benevolently at Crosbie. There was despair in the face of the detective who was taking notes.

"I suppose," Lieutenant Crosbie said dryly, "that, boiled down, you mean that a case exactly like this never happened before but that you think it is legitimate?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Fine. Would you mind telling us once more of your actions for the period just before the murder last night?"

There was a sigh of relief from the other detective, and Frank didn't blame him.

"I was with the others in the living room until Mr. Davall returned," Langdon answered. "Then we all came upstairs together for the experiment. I was in my room from about eight o'clock until I heard the screaming downstairs."

"You weren't out of your room between eight and nine?"

"Naturally not."

"Your door wasn't open at any time?"

"No."

"And you saw no one?"

"No."

"Did you hear any unusual noise in the hall?"

"No. I probably wouldn't have noticed any noise, however, while engaged in the experiment."

"I believe you said that you had never seen, or heard of, Sax Britt before?" Crosbie said.

"That's correct, Lieutenant. In fact, I remarked that it was rather odd Mr. Davall was using an agent none of us knew. That is it seemed we should at least have heard of him."

"Did you know any of the others before coming here?"

"Only Mr. Wilson. I met him about a month ago at a meeting of a group of people interested in extra-sensory perception."

"I see. Now would you tell us where you were this afternoon when the attack was made on Bruce?"

"I'm not sure of course," Langdon said, "but I must have been in the large study. I had been there for several minutes, looking up something in a book by Caslant. Then I started up to my room and was only half-way up the stairs when Mr. Van Dyke and Mr. Bruce came running in."

"Why in the study?" Crosbie asked. "I mean it would seem that Joyce's books would be in the library."

"Not his books on telepathy. His interest is only recent, you know, and I believe that his library was already well filled. So he put all of his books on telepathy in the large study. There is also a considerable library in the smaller study."

"Did you see anyone else while you were in the study?"

"No."

"We came downstairs from the roof at about a quarter past four," Crosbie said. "Where were you between then and, say, five o'clock?"

"In the study again," Langdon said.

"Didn't you tell Mr. Van Dyke, after the attack on Bruce, that you had finished reading that book?"

"Not finished," corrected Langdon. "I told you that I had run across a passage which I wished to check against a paragraph in a book in my room—this one in fact. You may remember that as we came down from the roof I stopped here in my room. I looked up the passage and returned to the study to continue reading Caslant."

"Then you weren't in the study all the time?"

"But I was," Langdon said. "I didn't leave it until one of your detectives asked me to come up to my room."

"But you were up here after the rest had gone downstairs?"

"Perhaps three or four minutes. Only long enough to read a paragraph in this book. Then I went down immediately. Surely you don't think I had anything to do with the accident to Miss Peterson?"

"Until somebody is under arrest for it," Crosbie growled, "I suspect everybody in the house. When you left your room, did you notice if Miss Peterson's door was still closed?"

"I didn't particularly notice, but I imagine it must have been. I should think I would have noticed if it were open."

"Did you meet anyone in the hallway or on the stairs?"

"No."

"Mr. Langdon," Lieutenant Crosbie said slowly, "Do you know the order in which a woman removes her clothes when she undresses?"

"I do not," Langdon said icily, like an outraged cleric, "nor do I care to learn. I have gotten along a good many years without a knowledge of sin."

"You look it," Crosbie couldn't resist saying. "You will please stay in your room. I may want to ask you some more questions."

"Is it part of your duty to insult citizens?" demanded Langdon as Crosbie started to leave.

"No, I do that on my own time," Crosbie answered wearily.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

As they came out into the hall again, Chariman Van Dyke puffed up the stairs. It seemed to Frank that every time he saw Van Dyke he was more wrinkled and shopworn. The rainbow-colored sport coat was all but shapeless and his tie was practically under his ear.

He wore an expression of cherubic glee. He was munching on a huge sandwich.

"You," he said, pointing a heavy forefinger at Lieutenant Crosbie, "thought you'd cheat everyone out of his dinner but I have taken steps."

"What have you been up to?" demanded Crosbie suspiciously. "You look too damned pleased with yourself.

"You wrong me," Van Dyke said innocently. "I merely bear the beatific expression of the well-fed man."

"It took you all this time to get a sandwich?"

"This is my second one," Van Dyke said proudly. "I did call the network to be sure they were sending men to set up a microphone. You'll enjoy my broadcast, Lieutenant."

"I'm not so sure," Crosbie growled. He turned and led the way to the room occupied by Sidney Wilson. Van Dyke followed behind them, munching audibly on his sandwich. The sound of it made Frank conscious that he was hungry.

Sidney Wilson opened the door at Crosbie's knock.

"Ah," he said, cocking his head on one side and regarding Lieutenant Crosbie brightly. "I thought you might be coming along any minute now. You may rest assured, Lieutenant, that I will do anything in my power to assist you. Only this morning I was saying—"

"I'm sure you will," Crosbie interrupted hastily. "Now, Mr. Wilson, as one of the four who apparently caught the murderer's thoughts last night, I want you to tell me what you thought of it. I mean of the fact that four of you seemed to get the murderer's thoughts. Was it completely legitimate?"

"Oh, decidedly. Yes, indeed. But I see what you mean. You think perhaps one person knew what the murderer's thoughts were and put those down after committing the murder. Very clever, Lieutenant, very clever."

"Do you think that might have happened?"

"Perhaps. It would be difficult to say, don't you think? Definitely difficult."

"I'd like your opinion of the others involved. What about Mr. Langdon?"

"Very capable," Wilson said, nodding his head. "Very well informed indeed. And some of his results are astonishing. I was just telling him that yesterday in this very room."

"And Mr. Joyce?"

"A splendid man," Wilson said warmly. "I have nothing but admiration for these captains of industry. He displays a heartening interest in telepathy. Heartening."

"Mr. Davall?"

"Very sound. Inclined to levity occasionally and I sometimes suspect his sincerity about telepathy, but basically he is very sound."

"And the three girls?"

"Willing, of course. Not too well informed, but willing."

"Did you know Miss Peterson well?"

"No, although I feel quite saddened by her passing. Death is always sad, isn't it?"

"You had met Mr. Langdon before?"

"Yes indeed. About a month ago, I believe. We had quite an interesting talk then. Naturally I was happy to see him taking part in this experiment."

"But you knew none of the others before coming here?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"You did not know Mr. Britt?"

"No. I thought it unusual at first but in view of your remarks concerning him, I find it quite understandable."

"You came upstairs with the others last night?"

"Ah, the routine checking up, eh?" Wilson said. "I wondered if you did that . . . Yes, I came up at the same time. Just a few minutes before eight, I believe."

"You came into your room immediately?"

"Of course. It is necessary to compose oneself in order to be sensitive to the incoming thought currents."

"And you weren't out of the room again until Miss Lee started screaming downstairs around nine?"

"Quite correct. Naturally I wouldn't leave my room in the middle of an experiment. Not at all."

"Were you aware that the scissors were in the living room?"

"Yes indeed. Mr. Davall was using them earlier in a bit of conjuring. Very clever, too."

"This afternoon when the attack was made on Bruce, you were in with Mr. Davall and Miss Walker?"

"Ah, yes. Mr. Davall wished to ask me a few questions about my impressions."

"How long were you there?"

"I should say perhaps ten or fifteen minutes before you appeared in the hallway."

"Later, you went up on the roof with us, as I remember. Now when we came back downstairs, what did you do?"

"I went into the kitchen for a drink of ice water. Then I returned upstairs to my room."

"Why?"

"I—ah—found it necessary to use the bathroom," Wilson said, making it sound coy.

"How long would you say you were downstairs?"

"Perhaps ten minutes. I was chatting a few minutes to the butler about the flower beds on the grounds. I don't recall when I have seen such beautiful gladiolae. They—"

"Did you," Crosbie interrupted hastily, "come directly up the front stairs when you finished talking with the butler?"

"Yes. That was, I should say definitely, about ten or twelve minutes after we had left the roof."

Chariman Van Dyke pulled some paper from his pocket and scrawled on it with a stub of pencil. Crosbie looked annoyed, but turned his attention back to Wilson.

"Did you meet anyone on your way up?"

"Not exactly," Wilson said, "although I saw Mr. Joyce knocking at Miss Peterson's door."

"What?" exclaimed Crosbie. "Why didn't you mention this before?"

"I didn't think it important," stammered Wilson. "I believe he was in the practice of going to her room."

"All right. Did you see him go into her room?"

"Oh, no."

"But he might have been unlocking the door with a key?"

"No, nothing like that. He was just knocking, but she apparently didn't answer. It never occurred to me before, but do you suppose she was already dead?"

"Maybe," Crosbie said sourly. "Did you see him leave?"

"Not exactly. But I am inclined to believe he was turning away as I entered my room."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't believe so. I'm quite sure he didn't."

"When you came to your room, you remained here for some time?"

"Yes indeed. I was here when one of your detectives knocked at the door and said we were all to remain in our rooms for questioning."

"You weren't out again?"

"No."

"You saw no one else?"

"No."

"Mr. Wilson," Crosbie said, "do you know in what order a woman removes her clothes in undressing?"

Sidney Wilson's face flushed.

"I'm—ah—afraid not. Mrs. Wilson always undressed in her own dressing room."

"Okay. Stay here for the time being."

"Ah, Lieutenant! I have always been a great reader of detective stories and I would enjoy hearing your theories of this case. Most difficult, isn't it?"

"Later," Crosbie muttered and fled. The others followed, ushered out of the room by the bellowing laughter of Chariman Van Dyke.

It was the first time he had laughed in an hour.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Chariman Van Dyke beamed like an overgrown kid with a new toy as he stared over the top of his glasses at Lieutenant Crosbie.

"Where are you going now?" he demanded.

"I'm going to find out why Martin Joyce lied to us," Crosbie said grimly. "He said that he was down in the small study all the time between four-fifteen and a quarter to five."

"I know why he lied," Van Dyke said.

"I'm beginning to suspect that you know a lot of other things," Crosbie said. "I don't give a damn if you are the great Chariman Van Dyke—you're going to find yourself in a Westchester County jail if you don't start coming across pretty soon."

"You want to know who the murderer is?" Van Dyke asked innocently.

"Do you know?" Crosbie countered.

"Certainly I know."

"Who?"

"I'll tell it in my own way and in my own time," Van Dyke said, "or I won't tell it at all and you can go on floundering around in your own juice."

"How long have you known who the murderer was?"

"About twenty minutes."

"I'll give you just thirty minutes," Crosbie said finally. "If you haven't named the murderer and offered complete proof by that time, I swear I'll arrest you for obstructing justice."

"Got you with your pants down now," chortled Van Dyke. "Thirty minutes will be just right. That will make it seven-fifteen and my broadcast goes on at seven-thirty."

"I thought that's what you were waiting for," Frank said.

"Quiet, urchin," Van Dyke growled, "or I won't let you listen to the logic of the most brilliant mind in the Twentieth Century. First, I'm going to show you how the murder was committed. Come on."

Van Dyke turned and lumbered down the stairs. Lieutenant Crosbie cast a regretful glance in the direction of Martin Joyce's room and followed, with the other detective and Frank bringing up the rear.

Van Dyke went straight to the large study. It was obvious from the expression on his face that he was expecting to enjoy himself. He was gloating in advance.

"You," he said to Lieutenant Crosbie, "will play the part of the victim and be thankful that I am filled with the milk of human kindness. Sit in that chair."

The lieutenant crossed the room and dropped into the chair where they had found Britt the night before.

"Frank, you and that anemic-looking bloodhound will serve as spectators," Van Dyke said. "There was enough light in here last night to distinguish the outlines of objects, but I said it could be done in total darkness and by heaven I'll prove it. Frank, blindfold me."

"Is that necessary?" Crosbie asked.

"I said we'd do it my way," Van Dyke roared. "I'm going to prove it to you so that there won't be any ifs and buts when I've finished. Blindfold me."

He held out a wrinkled handkerchief to Frank.

"Go ahead, you village halfwit," he said. "Don't stand there like the stag at bay!"

"You'll have to stoop down or I'll have to stand on a chair."

"Half-grown runts," growled Van Dyke, but he stooped down so that Frank could put the handkerchief over his eyes.

"Keep quiet or I'll trip you after the blindfold is on," Frank said. He knotted the handkerchief in the back of Van Dyke's head.

"You try it and I'll kick you where it'll hurt your honeymoon the worst," Van Dyke said. "There," he added as Frank stepped away, "will you admit that I can't see?"

Frank had folded the handkerchief a couple of times so that the thickest part was directly over his eyes. It was knotted tightly and there was no doubt that it was as good a job as could be done.

"Yes," Crosbie agreed, after looking at it carefully.

"All right. Here I come, ready or not," Van Dyke said. "You'll have to come over to my house and play some time."

He moved slowly towards the corner, with his hands outstretched. When his fingertips touched the chair, he stopped. He straightened up.

His left hand moved out to touch the top of Lieutenant Crosbie's head and the fingers clenched the hair. Then his right hand, with the forefinger extended, stabbed forward. The end of his finger came to a stop right on the edge of Crosbie's left eye.

"There," Van Dyke said triumphantly, jerking the handkerchief from his eyes with his left hand. He left it hanging around his neck.

"Don't straighten your hair, you adolescent Romeo," he howled as Crosbie lifted his hand to smooth his hair. "Did this detective of yours see the corpse last night?"

"Yes, but—"

"Take a look, son," Van Dyke told the detective, pointing at Crosbie's hair. "What does that remind you of?"

The detective stepped closer and looked at the mussed hair.

"It does look just like his hair," he said. "I mean mussed up the same way."

"That's right," agreed Frank.

"Of course it does," Van Dyke said. "The corpse had his hair mussed up by the same method. All right, pretty yourself up."

"Admitting that it worked that time," Crosbie said cautiously, "how about the angle that the scissors entered the eye?"

"I thought you'd bring that up," Van Dyke said, "so I put a pair of scissors in my pocket before coming up. Look."

He took a large pair of scissors from his pocket and put his second and third fingers through the handle. Then he closed his hand into a fist. The scissors, with the blades closed, stuck straight out from his fist.

"All the murderer had to do was strike on a straight line," Van Dyke said, "and, bingo, out pops an eye."

"That looks like it would work," Crosbie admitted. "But there's no proof that you could hit the eye every time. You might have been lucky in that one attempt."

"There is nothing more pig-headed than a cop!" exclaimed Van Dyke. "Try it yourself as many times as you like. Just grab someone by the top of the hair, shut your eyes and jab. You won't hit them smack in the eye every time. But you'll come so close that if you were using scissors or a knife the blade would slip into the eye socket. Almost any place you hit, it'll glance off the bone. In fact, that probably did happen because there was a gash in his cheek. In fact, the gash in the cheek and the mussed hair gave me the idea of the way it was done."

"I see one flaw in it," Crosbie said.

"What?" Van Dyke challenged.

"What was Britt doing all that time? He wasn't a telepathy expert—he was a confidence man, so the idea that he was in a hypnotic state goes out the window. Are you trying to tell me that he just sat there quietly while someone walked up in the darkness, grabbed him by the hair and stuck a pair of scissors in his eye?"

"You should have been strangled in the crib with your diapers!" Van Dyke growled. "You are a living argument for the mercy killing of feeble-minded infants! I don't know why I even bother to talk to you! Flaw, my grandmother's G-string! Do I have to act out everything for you?

"Suppose you are Britt, if your feeble imagination won't be overworked by the strain. You have come here to blackmail a certain person into cutting you in on whatever little scheme he is cooking up. You are sitting in here in a dark room, thinking about your plans for making money. You know that your victim is a smart man and has undoubtedly found a way to gaff the set-up here and will help to fix it so that you can get away with the role you're playing. You know he must be playing for big stakes and will do anything to keep from having the scheme spoiled.

"Now while you are sitting in that chair, you hear someone whisper your name. The whisperer identifies himself as your victim. He says he knows why you are here and that he is willing to cut you in. He wants to talk to you while everyone else is occupied. In the meantime, he is coming towards you. What would you do?"

"Sit still, I suppose," admitted Crosbie.

"Of course you would. This means an easy victory. You know that you will both have to whisper and that you dare not turn on the light. He says he's willing to cut you in, so there isn't anything to be frightened about. You don't think anything about it when he moves closer. Then he grabs your hair and has the scissors in your eye before you know anything is happening."

"How do you know it happened that way?"

"Because that's the only way it could have happened," howled Van Dyke. "If you can't use your brains enough to see that, you ought to turn in your badge and get a job as a towel boy in a house of ill fame!"

"I don't doubt that you know plenty of them," Crosbie said, trying to hold his own.

Van Dyke became exaggerated sweetness and light.

"Certainly I do," he said. "I'll give you a note to the finest Madam this side of the Mississippi and you can start work the first thing in the morning."

"All right," Crosbie said with a grin. "I surrender. I'll admit that your reconstruction of the crime sounds logical—if you can follow it up by pinning it on someone."

"I said I could, didn't I?"

"You've said a lot of things. Can you prove it and furnish enough proof for a conviction?"

"I can, stupid."

"Is it Joyce?" Lieutenant Crosbie asked.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Van Dyke glared at Crosbie.

"Do you think," he growled, evading the question, "that you're smart enough to solve this case?"

"I think I could, in time," Crosbie said.

"That's what I wanted to hear," Van Dyke said gleefully. "I saw you glaring like a frustrated pup when I was making a note up in Wilson's room. What I was doing was putting the finishing touches to a list covering the whole case. I'll admit I know a few things that aren't on the list but the information that is there, together with things that you definitely know, is enough to name the murderer. In fact, there is only one person who could possibly be the murderer. In addition to the facts, I've made comments that might stir your puny brain into activity."

"You're determined to use your whole half hour, aren't you?" Crosbie said.

"Oh, so you admit defeat in advance!" Van Dyke said triumphantly.

"I do not," Crosbie said grimly. He grabbed the sheaf of papers from Van Dyke's hand and bent over them. Frank moved around where he could look over his shoulder.

Van Dyke had made two columns down the sheet of paper with the facts on the left and his comments on the right. He began chuckling as he saw that Crosbie was already reading some of the comments.

FIRST MURDER

Friday Night

FACTS		*COMMENT*
7:45.	Davall arrived with Britt and took him right into study.	
7:50.	Davall returned and herded his flock upstairs.	*Was anyone in a hurry?*
7:56.	Davall came downstairs and told Britt to think about Washington Monument.	
8:00.	Davall went to kitchen and asked butler to bring him a cup of coffee.	*Very sinister.*

8:00—8:30.	Davall sat in the dining room having his coffee.	*? . . . Not proved.*
8:00—8:15.	Most likely time that murder was committed.	*Don't ask me why.*
8:30—8:55.	Davall was on porch where he could see porch entrance to large study.	*? . . . Not proved.*
8:00—8:55.	Frank Bruce was in his room . . . Martin Joyce was in his room. . . Kalli Walker was in her room. . . Renee Lee was her room. . . Helen Peterson was in her room. . . Philip Langdon was in his room. . . Sidney Wilson was in his room. . . . The servants were all in the kitchen. . .	*? . . . Not proved.* *? . . . Not proved.* *? . . . Not proved.* *? . . . Not proved.* *? . . . Not proved.* *? . . . Not proved.* *The king was in the counting house.* *Not a single alibi!*
8:55.	Lee discovers the body and starts screeching.	*Proved!*
8:57—9:05.	A moronic playwright, Frank Bruce, reaches the scene followed by Davall, et al.	*Was everybody surprised?*
9:10.	I arrived.	*Why?*
9:11.	Said moronic playwright chats of frivolities before informing me of murder. Confirmed to me by Davall.	
9:25.	Police arrive, led by Lieut. Richard Crosbie.	*Doesn't look bright!*
9:45.	Lieut. Crosbie makes an ass of himself for first time.	*Why so long?*
10:15.	Police retire, baffled.	

ATTACK ON BRUCE

Saturday afternoon

1:30—3:30.	Lieut. Crosbie lollygags in kitchen with Renee Lee.	*Can't even have a murder without sex crawling in!*

3:00.	While in large study, Frank Bruce tells me he heard someone gasp when Britt entered. Can't remember who.	*Doubtful if he ever knew who it was.*
3:15.	I discover microphone hidden in large study. . . Joyce wants to establish Institute!	*No chance to examine.* *Ego, thou are Man!*
3:30.	Lieut. Crosbie makes an ass of himself for second time.	*!*
3:50.	I discover microphone is still in room but wire has been ripped loose. Impossible to trace it.	*I spoke once while bending over to examine mike. Warned murderer? . . Radios in every room. So what?*
3:52.	I join Frank in front of house.	*Lipstick all over Frank!*
3:55.	Davall goes upstairs.	
3:57.	Tell Frank about microphone.	
3:59.	Somebody shoves trunk off roof, trying to hit Frank. I see it in time to push him out of way.	*Must be because he mentioned gasp. . . Overheard?*
3:59:16.	Frank and I rush in front door.	
3:50—3:59.	Martin Joyce was in the small study by himself. . . Philip Langdon was in the large study by himself. . . Helen Peterson was in her room by herself. . . Renee Lee was in dining room with Law and Order. . . Davall, Sidney Wilson and Kalli Walker were together in Davall's room. . . Servants were in kitchen.	*Alibi?* *Maybe?* *Could be?* *At last, some alibis!* *Are they ever anywhere else?*
3:59:17.	Frank and I step into the foyer. Martin Joyce is on the stairs within three steps of top. . . . Philip Langdon is on the stairs just below Joyce. . . Renee Lee and Lieut. come rushing in from dining room. . . All heard crash of trunk.	

4:02.	Arrive on second floor. Davall, Wilson and Walker standing in doorway, registering question marks. . . I notice that Helen Peterson's door is open.	*Why the open door?*
4:04.	Helen Peterson sticks head out of door and wants to know what happened.	
4:04:30.	The parade moves on down to Peterson's room. I notice from where she was sitting she commands complete view of the back stairs. She claims no one used the stairs to reach the roof.	*Why was she going to lie about door being open? Was she on roof?*
4:06.	Lieut. almost makes ass of himself again.	
4:07.	We leave for the roof. Peterson slams door and locks it.	*Under great emotional strain. Why?*
4:08—4:13.	Nothing on roof.	
4:13.	We leave roof.	
4:14.	Langdon stops off at his room.	
4:16.	I start cogitating.	*Was the trunk manipulated by remote control?*
4:16.	Lieut. starts checking trunk for fingerprints.	

SECOND MURDER

4:15—4:25.	Helen Peterson was killed within this period.	*So what? Murderer needed no more than 5 minutes.*
4:15—4:19.	Langdon was in room.	*No proof.*
4:19—5:10.	Langdon was in study.	*No proof.*
4:15—4:24.	Wilson was in the kitchen.	*Maybe . . Butler not sure of time.*
4:25—5:10.	Wilson was in his room.	*No proof.*
4:15.	Joyce went to small study.	*For how long?*
4:25.	Joyce knocking at Peterson's door.	
4:15—4:25.	Davall was in his room with Kalli Walker.	*Not verified but probably true.*
4:15—4:25.	Renee Lee was probably with Lieut. Crosbie.	*Was she?*

4:40. Lieut. Crosbie goes upstairs and knocks on Peterson's door. Was going to make an ass of himself again.	
4:42. No answer to repeated knockings. Lieut. Crosbie goes downstairs to ask Joyce for a master key.	
4:50. Lieut. Crosbie unlocks the door and discovers the murder. He sends for me.	
5:00. I arrive.	
5:02. Frank discovers she was blonde. Lieut. unimpressed, being more impressed by his theory of suicide.	*Should prove something—an amateur would have guessed red-head.*
5:02—5:20. I waste my time proving his theory is moronic.	*Bath tub drained . . .* *Murderer leaned on it?* *Clothes indicate haste?*
5:25. Lieut. admits I am right.	*Now, who's a bungling amateur?*
5:30. We go to question Davall.	
5:30—5:50. With Davall, going over all three times.	*Davall had an idea?*
5:50—6:05. We question Joyce, Lieut. being the great sleuth.	*Why did Joyce lie about being in hallway4:25?* *Why was he there?*
6:05. We go to Langdon's room.	
6:05—6:30. Questioning Langdon. Lieut. learns about telepathy.	*Why did Langdon's watch stop?*
6:09. I leave.	*That annoys you, doesn't it?*
6:31. I return with sandwich.	
6:32—6:42. We question Sidney Wilson.	*Why was he so anxious to find out what you had learned?*
6:43. Lieut. still baffled.	
6:44. He capitulates!	*Why did Britt come here?* *Who was he going to blackmail into splitting profits?* *Profits from what?* *What was Peterson's role?*

Why was she killed?
What was her income from the last few months?
Who is the one person—and the only—who could possibly be guilty of the two murders and the attack on Frank?
Will you admit that the same person was back of all three?

"If this is another one of your games," Lieutenant Crosbie said as he finished reading, "I'll run you in, even if it costs me my badge."

"Meaning, you don't get it?" Van Dyke asked gleefully. "I knew I'd catch you with your face down!"

"Anybody can ask a lot of questions," Crosbie said defensively. "So Britt came here to blackmail someone. That doesn't mean that he wanted them to split any profits. More likely, he wanted to blackmail them because of something in their past. Peterson was killed because she knew too much. As for there being only one person who could have committed the crimes, your own time list shows that there were several who could have."

"One thing you left out, Fuzzy," Frank offered. "Did you forget about Whitey telling us the cops thought Britt had been working with a blonde? Helen Peterson turns out to be blonde, she's had a mysterious source of income for the past two months, and she was surprised at seeing Britt and obviously knew him. So she must have been trying to pull a job on her own. He might have tried to horn in. There might have been someone else involved or she might have killed Britt and then someone else killed her."

"But he didn't tell us that Britt had been working with a blonde woman," Van Dyke said triumphantly. "He said that a blonde woman and a man had been working some confidence games and the cops *suspected* Britt of being the man. But Whitey knew it wasn't Britt. And there a whole new field of thought is opened to us. The trouble all along in this case is that we've had the right weapon but we've pointed it in the wrong direction."

"I still think you're playing games," Crosbie said. "I want to see proof and have less talk."

"All right, my aging juvenile, you shall have it even if it gags you. Get everyone down in the living room and I'll do your work for you."

CHAPTER TWENTY

There was tension in the air as everyone filed into the living room and took their seats, as though they knew they were gathering for the kill. There was a strange reluctance to sit next to one another, except for Kalli who took the chair next to Frank, and Renee Lee who tried to get close to her detective.

Chariman Van Dyke was the only one who looked happy. He was almost beaming as he surveyed his little audience.

It was his day!

"Your time is growing short," Lieutenant Crosbie reminded Van Dyke.

"Stop watching the clock like a vulture," Van Dyke said. "You're just jealous that you're not standing up here."

Again there was a short silence while everyone shifted uncomfortably in their seats. They were waiting for Van Dyke, but it was Davall who spoke first.

"Fuzzy," he said, "I have an idea how that trunk was dropped from the roof without anyone being up there when it happened."

"I was wondering when you'd come out with it," Van Dyke said. "I've seen too much of your hocus-pocus not to know there was something on your mind when we were talking to you. You had that isn't-it-nice-to-be-fooled smile on your face that you use for morons that pay money to watch you do your tricks. Out with it, charlatan!"

"I'm not saying it was done this way," Davall said, "but it could have been. Someone could have gone up on the roof earlier with the trunk, balanced it on the edge, run a thread from a reel through the handle, and then, holding it tight, gone back downstairs. They could continue to hold the trunk there by the thread until they were ready to let it go. Releasing the end of the thread would send the trunk toppling over and at the same time the reel would have pulled the thread in."

"It's lousy," Van Dyke said promptly. "Tell him what's wrong with it, Frank. I won't even dirty my hands."

"The main thing," Frank said slowly, "is that there wouldn't be any guarantee that the trunk would hit me. It couldn't be aimed."

"Of course," snorted Van Dyke. "But that's only part of it. If it were practical, Davall, a reel shill wouldn't be needed. Just the thread and then pull it in afterward. Magic is all right for the stage but not for murder. But it not only was impractical but also much more complicated than the actual method."

"Okay," Davall said, shrugging. "That's my only contribution." He produced a coin from the air and turned his attention to it.

"It's still more than some others have contributed," Van Dyke said, glaring at Lieutenant Crosbie.

"I haven't heard anything but talk from you," Crosbie retorted.

"You're both acting like a couple of kids," Kalli Walker said.

"The wench is right," Van Dyke said. He clasped his hands behind him, making the rainbow coat look even more mussed, and cleared his throat. He stared at them over the top of his glasses.

"One thing I want to get straight," he said. "None of this filly-faddle about the murderer being clever and smart. Maybe he is in other lines, but he wasn't about either of his two murders. My sainted aunt, no! He was so lucky that if he'd been playing roulette, he would have broken a dozen banks.

"I'm going to start at the beginning—regardless of how much that hick cop glares at me. It happens to be necessary and I'm entitled to my fun anyway.

"The villain of this piece," Van Dyke said with obvious relish, "is a confidence man. For obvious reasons, we will call him Deacon Long for the present. When it was announced in the papers that Martin Joyce was going to finance a telepathy test, he conceived a great idea. He started planning very, very carefully.

"I might add that this Deacon Long was on very intimate terms with a wench named Helen Peterson. She came from a good family which had lost its money and the last few years coasted on the reputation of some vague ancestor who was enough of a cut-throat to be admitted to the Four Hundred. There is fairly conclusive evidence that she helped him fleece at least three men out of considerable money. She was also a part of the scheme which was to ripen and bear fruit as a result of this telepathy experiment."

"Just a minute," Martin Joyce interrupted. "You mean that she was part of a scheme to defraud me of some money?"

Chariman Van Dyke nodded.

Joyce sank back in his chair and for a moment he really looked old. Frank found himself feeling sorry for him, in spite of his reputation.

"I have no doubt," Van Dyke said, "that the plan was well worked out, but someone else knew about it besides Helen Peterson and this confidence man. The other person was Sim Bailey, whom you knew as Sax Britt. He, too, was a confidence man, as you know, but more often he specialized in blackmailing other confidence men into sharing with him. I don't pretend to know how he learned of this, but know he did. He quickly boned up on telepathy and approached Davall as an agent, making his story strong enough to be convincing.

"When Britt arrived, he was recognized by both Helen Peterson and her comrade in crime. That recognition explains why Mr. Joyce noticed that she started. Evidently Britt had been pointed out to her and she, too, guessed why he was there.

"Ordinarily, I understand, confidence men resort to violence less than any other criminals. But our confidence man was shooting for the biggest stake of his life and with the arrival of Britt he saw a large share of it slipping away from him. I suspect in addition to the thought of losing the money, he hated the idea of sharing the coup with Britt from the standpoint of glory. The size of it was such that it would establish a record in the history of confidence games. One million dollars was the sum."

As Van Dyke paused to let that sink in, Sidney Wilson got up and started to step out of the door near his chair.

"Sit down," Lieutenant Crosbie said sharply.

"I—ah—was just going for a drink of water," Wilson explained. "It wouldn't take but a minute. I assure you I had nothing else in mind."

"I said sit down," Crosbie repeated. "If you try to leave this room, they'll have to give you your water through a straw."

Wilson sank back in his chair and swallowed nervously.

"I'd like to ask a question before you go on," Crosbie said.

"What?" growled Van Dyke. He was displeased because the interruption had spoiled the full effect of his announcement.

"Is this Deacon Long in the room now?"

"He is," Van Dyke said. "If any of you have studied the history of murder, you will not be surprised that the prospect of a million dollars was enough to cause our confidence man to decide immediately that Britt had to die. I'm not sure that I wouldn't commit murder for that much myself. On occasions I would do it for much less.

"At 8 o'clock Davall herded his charges upstairs. Our confidence man entered his room and stayed there for about five or six minutes. Then he slipped out and came down the back stairs. He went into the library, out on the porch and into the living room. No one could see him. He picked up the scissors, which he had noticed earlier, and went back to the large study. He called Britt's name in a whisper and identified himself, telling Britt that he knew why the latter was here and saying that he was willing to come to an agreement at once.

"Britt fell for it and wasn't suspicious when the murderer came close to him, apparently to hold a whispered conference. Instead a hand grabbed him by the hair and the scissors were jabbed through his eye into the brain. The murderer turned and slipped back upstairs the same way he had come down. I doubt if the whole thing took more than five minutes. Upstairs, he told Helen Peterson what had happened and warned her to be on her guard. He probably threatened her. She drew no line at a little swindling—which has been true of others—but she probably did not relish murder. If you'll recall, she didn't even try to get a message that night. Instead she doodled, and no one noticed that her doodling represented a prison window. The murderer, too, made a mistake but it was one which had little chance of being detected. He also destroyed Frank's paper to throw suspicion on him.

"This is where the luck I mentioned comes in. I found another reason why Britt might have come to this house. That reason led us off on a tangent that saved the murderer's hide for a few hours. Unfortunately, my mind was too filled with that false clue so that I completely failed to see the significance in a chance remark that Frank Bruce made, or everything might have been solved four hours ago and Helen Peterson would still be alive."

"That I made?" Frank exclaimed. "What was it?"

"Later, urchin."

"I really feel quite faint," Sidney Wilson said. "Couldn't I—"

"No!" Crosbie said. "And shut up!"

Wilson subsided, but he looked quite ill.

"The murderer," Van Dyke continued, "felt quite secure until he happened to overhear Frank telling me that he remembered hearing someone in the living room gasp when Britt entered last night. Now it is doubtful that Frank ever knew who it was he heard, but the murderer was afraid to take a chance. He took a big risk and again he was lucky. As soon as Lieutenant Crosbie had finished his blunder of trying to pin it on Frank, the murderer went up on the roof, taking the trunk from the attic. Frank and I were in the front talking. He shoved the trunk over and scrambled downstairs to establish himself where it would seem impossible for him to have been on the roof. He again was lucky in that the positions of others helped to make his apparent alibi even stronger. But it still must have been a shock for him to see Frank walk in the door, as he hadn't waited on the roof long enough to see that he had missed.

"At the same time, that was his undoing. With each step, certain damning things fitted together pointing towards him. And the attack on Frank made Helen Peterson—for she did see him on the stairs—more frightened and he saw that she was on the verge of cracking.

"The one thing the murderer possessed was the ability to think and act quickly. No sooner were we downstairs than he knocked at her door. Naturally she let him in. But there were no words wasted. He knocked her out, undressed her and drowned her in the already-filled tub, hoping to make it look like suicide. But his very speed was his undoing. If he had taken more time, he would have known he had accidentally opened the drain. If the water hadn't drained out of the tub, we might have overlooked the arrangement of her clothes.

"It's surprising how great a number of facts pointed directly to the murderer all the time and which we overlooked because we took certain other things for granted. Basically, it's very much like one of those infernal tricks that Davall is always foisting on people. You expect a certain thing to happen and regardless of what happens you'll swear by the Great White Father that it was what you expected.

"The idea was planted in our heads that a blonde girl might have been working with Britt. When we found the blonde girl, it took an earthquake to get the idea of Britt out of our heads. We knew that Britt could have had another reason for coming here and, by God, we wouldn't hear of his having two reasons. Lieutenant Crosbie had already pictured the murder being committed a certain way and I practically had to knock him down to convince him that it really happened an utterly different way. Martin Joyce was going to name the murderer, without knowing it of course, this afternoon, but he was interrupted. Because I knew his sentence could have ended one way, I took it for granted that there wasn't any other way. We knew all along that one man had boned up on telepathy until he sounded like an expert—but, like a herd of halfwits, we never thought that anyone else could do the same thing.

"The most glaring clue of all was completely overlooked, although why in the name of my grandmother's G-string we should be willing to accept a miracle as great as if this house were to fly, I'll never know. A little more and the murderer would have been in the same class with Madeline Smith who poisoned her lover, Pierre Emile L'Angelier, in 1857 and was released because *too much* arsenic was found in his stomach.

"I finally woke up about two hours ago and then I knew who the murderer was. I not only knew who he was, but I knew every single movement he made. I can see Lieutenant Crosbie stirring in righteous wrath, thinking I wanted to be secretive and mysterious. But never was a man more wronged! The trouble is that I knew who the murderer was but every single factor was nothing but circumstantial evidence. A good lawyer would have made monkeys out of the Westchester police—not a difficult task if Crosbie is a sample. But then I discovered one place where the murderer wasn't so lucky. There was a little accident, of which he wasn't even conscious, which will enable the police to prove scientifically that he killed Helen Peterson. In a way, Helen Peterson furnished that proof herself."

"Time," reminded Crosbie as Van Dyke stopped to gloat for a moment.

"You are the fifth son of the fifth son of a piratical joy-killer," roared Van Dyke. "You'll probably hold a stop watch on your wife the night of your honeymoon! How do you expect me to have any fun, you Cossack? . . . . All right, I'm coming to it! I just want to ask Martin Joyce a couple of questions. First, to clear up your suspicions. Joyce, the lieutenant is very much worried about your knocking on Helen Peterson's door at twenty-five minutes past four. Will you tell him why?"

"I was worried about the way she had acted when you were questioning her," Joyce said. "Not that I believed she was guilty, but I thought perhaps she was involved in some way against her will. I wanted to ask her if there was anything I could do to help her."

"And she didn't answer because she was already dead," Van Dyke said. "Now, will you tell the lieutenant why you lied about being there?"

"I realized that she must have been killed shortly before then," Joyce said, "and I was afraid it would look bad. I don't suppose it was the wisest thing to do, but I felt I was close enough to being on the spot anyway. I didn't know that anyone had seen me."

"It was a completely normal action—which is probably the only way you're normal," Van Dyke said. "You have been thinking of establishing an Institute of Extra-Sensory Perception—probably to sell more of those bump readers of yours. How much money were you going to put in it?"

"One million dollars," Joyce said wryly.

"Who was to be the head of the Institute?"

"Philip Langdon."

"Who," Van Dyke said triumphantly, "is also known in certain circles as Deacon Long—although Philip Long is his real name. Take your bow, Deacon."

All eyes were centered on the man they had known as Philip Langdon. He still looked the same, the white-haired, gentlemanly scholar or cleric, yet at the same time something in his face was different. It was as though one shell had been removed and another taken its place.

"I have been listening to your discourse with a great deal of interest," he said carefully. "I can understand why you command such a large salary as a lecturer. One thing, however, struck me. My being here may seem rather odd, but suppose we say that I have reformed and that my interest in telepathy is genuine. I'm afraid it would be difficult to prove that I intended fraud—especially since there are not witnesses. I have a legal right to the name of Philip Langdon since my birth certificate is made out in the name of Philip Langdon Long. As I believe you mentioned, your attempts to link me with the unfortunate deaths of two people are based on circumstantial evidence."

"Look at him wriggle," Van Dyke said. "You know, Deacon, if it weren't for the murders, there would be a huge joke—which only Joyce, Frank and I could enjoy—in your picking on Joyce as your mark. . . . Isn't mark the phrase you use in place of sucker?"

Langdon nodded gravely.

"But if you're worrying about proof," Van Dyke went on, "we have that, too. It's in that wristwatch you're wearing. When you dunked Helen Peterson you got it wet. Incidentally, I didn't mention that you are obviously ambidextrous. You knocked Helen Peterson out with a blow of your left fist and you drowned her with your right hand—which is where you wear your watch. The bath tub drain, I noticed, is on top of the tub and in about the only convenient place to rest a hand if you were bending over the tub. That was the way you happened to open the drain without noticing it. Then when we came in to question you, I noticed that the leather strap on your watch was wet. That supported the theory that the murderer had held her under the water with the right hand and leaned on the tub with the left.

The water had also gotten in the watch and stopped it as I discovered when I asked you the time."

"Sound reasoning," Langdon admitted calmly, "but scarcely proof." He was picking his words as carefully as a cat picks her way through tall grass. "Suppose we say that I absent-mindedly left my watch on when I took a shower."

"That might do very well," Van Dyke admitted, "if we were living in a less advanced age. As a murderer, you were born fifty years too late. Helen Peterson, you see, used a very smelly bath perfume. There isn't any more like it in this house. I looked to see. So any third-rate chemist can discover that perfume in your watch and in the leather band. Wriggle out of that, my fine-feathered pelican."

Langdon was silent for a moment and they could almost feel his mind searching desperately for a loop-hole.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The police had left. Only Lieutenant Crosbie was staying to listen to the broadcast. But he and Renee Lee had gone outdoors to watch his men drive away with the prisoner. The men from the National Broadcasting Company were setting up their equipment in the large study. Van Dyke, Frank, Kalli, Davall, and Martin Joyce were sitting in the living room. Wilson had gone for his drink.

The droning voice of a radio technician sounded from the study.

"One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four. A, B, C, D, A, B, C, D. . . ."

"Speaking of confidence men," Van Dyke said, turning to Martin Joyce, "reminds me that I am the chairman of a committee to help refugees. As such I'll expect a check from you for ten thousand dollars, made out to the committee. That's for keeping my mouth shut about certain things."

"Even when it's flavored with your charm," Frank said, "it's still called blackmail."

"We'll call it a one per cent commission on what I saved," Joyce said. "I'll give you the check tonight."

The front door opened and Lieutenant Crosbie entered with Renee Lee. His right arm was about her shoulders as they came into the living room.

"Well," Crosbie said, with a smile, "we certainly cleaned up this case in a hurry. Less than twenty-four hours."

"What do you mean 'We'?" growled Van Dyke. "All you've done is titillate your libido."

"Oh, I'll admit you did the solving," Crosbie said, "but it was my idea for you to solve it. So I can take credit for being a silent partner—in addition to the official credit."

"What do you mean?" Van Dyke demanded, suspiciously.

"I told you I was ambitious. I wanted this case solved quickly, and I knew you would have a better chance, because you knew these people and they wouldn't resent your nosing around.

"You see, I know a lot about you, even if I never met you before. Captain Elliott, of the New York police, is my uncle on my mother's side. He's told me all about you. Among other things, he said that you would be a good detective if anybody could ever find a way to make you work. He also mentioned that the only time you'd work was when you had to do something for a friend. So, last night, I pretended to believe that Davall was the murderer, figuring that would make you dig into the case. I'll admit I regretted it later, but not for long. I also have to confess that I did think for a while that Bruce was guilty—for which I apologize . . . . But I still get credit for making you work.

"I told Rawson to pretend to stop you when you left this morning, but to be damn sure he didn't succeed."

"I'VE BEEN HAD!" Van Dyke howled. "Taken over by a smooth-faced brat, who's still wet behind the ears."

"Now that we're all friends," Crosbie said with a grin, "I'd like to hear more about those glaring clues you kept mentioning. I still don't see them."

"Of course you don't," Van Dyke said gruffly, partly mollified by the opportunity of showing Crosbie up again. "The first and most obvious thing was Langdon's success at telepathy. I'm surprised that Davall didn't even get suspicious. Experts count it successful if a person merely gets the general outline of something, but Langdon was damn near perfect all the time. Everyone was amazed but no one was suspicious. I suppose he was smart enough not to be completely perfect as a rule.

"But last night he was concentrating on something else, so he reproduced the object completely, accurately. Don't forget they were upstairs before Davall told Britt he was to think about the Washington Monument. Yet Langdon drew it as accurately as any layman could if he was looking at the original. The odds against that happening are several billion to one. And you, my mail order detective, made no connection between that and the fact that there was a microphone planted in the study. The first night he was here, Langdon must have planted that microphone so he'd make the miraculous showing he did. That was his sales talk, you see, to get Joyce to set up the Institute with him as the head. I'll bet he was the one who suggested the Institute."

"He was," Joyce said.

"I still want to know what the clue was that I gave you?" Frank said.

"When we were coming back this afternoon, right after leaving Whitey Gibbs and hearing about Helen Peterson and a confidence man called Deacon, you mentioned the fact that Langdon looked like a rector or a Sunday school superintendent. We had every reason to connect a person who might look like that with Helen Peterson, but we didn't do it."

"I also said that I thought Langdon was the murderer," Frank said.

"So you're trying to horn in on the credit, too!" growled Van Dyke. "You also thought Wilson was, and you didn't have any reason to suspect either."

"I thought Wilson was when he was trying to leave the room before," Kalli said.

"The only thing that was wrong with him," Van Dyke chuckled, "was that he had begun to realize that Langdon was the murderer and he was sitting right beside him. He merely wanted to get away. Sidney Wilson is exactly what he seems to be, a boring little man."

"But what about this business that only one person could possibly be guilty?" Crosbie asked.

"If we accepted the idea that the two murders and the attack on Frank were the work of the same person, then that followed. Langdon was the only person who could have tried to drop the trunk on Frank—once Peterson was eliminated as a suspect."

"I still don't see how he could have done it," Frank said.

"Most people have no sense of time," Van Dyke said. "From the time the trunk was pushed until we entered the house about sixteen seconds passed, maybe more. A man of Langdon's build could have run down the back stairs, through the study and reached the front stairs in eight or ten seconds. I tested it out myself and I did it in fifteen seconds without running and I'm not exactly streamlined. But anybody as fat as Joyce would have been red in the face. Everybody else had an alibi.

"Joyce really had to be eliminated anyway. We knew we were dealing with some kind of confidence game and Joyce was the only logical target. In addition, Lieutenant Crosbie could give Joyce an alibi for the attack on Frank. He was sitting in such a spot that Joyce couldn't get out of the small study without being seen by Crosbie. Just remember Crosbie's own statement and take a look at the layout of the house."

"That clue of the perfect reproduction of the Washington Monument was the best," Davall said. "You were right, Fuzzy, in saying that I should have caught that. Such a thing is practically impossible. But everyone's attention was focused on the murder."

"Misdirection, you call it, when you do one of those miserable tricks of yours," Van Dyke said. "The rest of his drawing was almost as good. The death's heads. That was really doodling. If the telepathy had been legitimate on his part, I don't think it would be death's heads that he would see. But his mind was filled with death.

"Logically, Langdon also was the only person who could have killed Helen Peterson. The way her clothes were arranged told us that the murderer had undressed her. That was pretty certain evidence that she was killed very soon after we came downstairs. As we came past her door, her tub was filling. Yet she hadn't undressed when the murderer arrived. Therefore, he arrived very shortly after we went downstairs. Q. E. D. And Langdon was the only one who was upstairs during the first ten minutes after we went down. He stopped off at his room. He was probably already in her room, hitting her when we were at the foot of the stairs."

"Anyway *we* got him," Lieutenant Crosbie said cheerfully. "And the speed will help my record."

"Your perverted sense of smartness will some day earn you a good kick square in the teeth," growled Van Dyke. "I save your miserable job for you and all you do is gloat about how you did me in! I save Frank's life and all he does is grumble about being pushed in the rose bushes!"

"You won't have to save Frank any more," Kalli said. "I'm going to marry him and see that he never does anything more dangerous than write plays."

"That can be dangerous enough," Van Dyke said. "There is a limit to how much you can foist on to a long-suffering public. I suppose you'll devote all your spare time to breeding more moronic little play wrights!"

"Scads of them," Kalli said, laughing.

"This case has brought me luck in two ways," Lieutenant Crosbie said. "First, you plucked a feather for my official cap and then it was the means of meeting Renee. I know it's a little quick, but I asked her to marry me when we were outside—and she agreed to give it a try."

"Don't leer, you half-baked Sherlock!" Van Dyke said. "I don't want to know any of the sickening details of your sex life, legal or not. I won't send you a wedding present and I hope all of your children grow up to be burlesque comedians!"

"Mr. Van Dyke," one of the radio men called from the study.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Everyone sat quietly in the large study as the Great Man prepared to speak. Van Dyke, his rainbow coat wrinkling up around his shoulders, sat in front of a microphone placed on a card table.

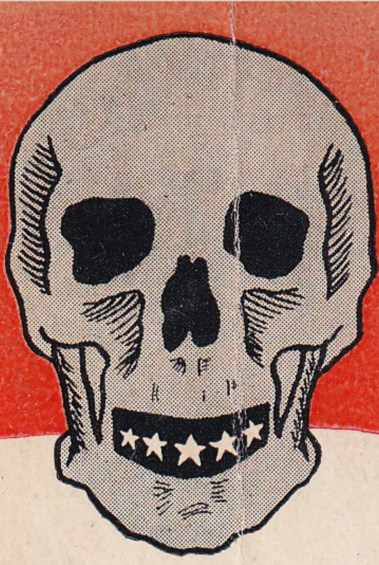
"Okay, New York," a technician said into a microphone. He raised his arm, his eyes on a watch in front of him. The arm dropped in signal to the announcer who sat in front of another microphone.

"Good evening, everybody," the announcer said smoothly. "This is *Crime Through The Years,* with Chariman Van Dyke, brought to you every Sunday night at this time through the courtesy of Pal cigarettes."

"Chariman Van Dyke speaking," Van Dyke said into the microphone, still scowling at Lieutenant Crosbie. "I am speaking to you tonight from the murder room of a mansion in Westchester County which may well rank with the apartment of Monsieur Chantrelle, or the historic supper room in Holyrood where Rizzio was dragged to his death.

"Not more than fifteen minutes ago, a white-haired, kindly-faced man, named Deacon Long, admitted that it was his hand that drove the scissors into the brain of Sim Bailey, alias Sax Britt, and brought a watery death to young and beautiful Helen. . . ."

THE END.



MURDER OUT OF MIND

by

Ken Crossen

THE CORPSE left a blueprint of the murder, all written out in the "doodlings" of half a dozen people. But it took the celebrated raconteur, wit and radio star, "Fuzzy" Van Dyke, to figure the meaning of the hieroglyphics written during an experiment in thought-wave transmission.

The house was filled with suspects: a famed magician and his beautiful secretary, a post-debutante of the New York social set, a chorus girl, a playwright, a mystery millionaire and two thought-wave experts. Throughout the story of grisly crime, the caustic Van Dyke curses his merry way—a new, refreshing figure for lovers of good detective characters.

Five Star Mystery

A Full-Length Original Novel—25c